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WINDOWS IN MATTHEW

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Windows in the New Testament
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Windows In Matthew

By

JAMES AUSTIN RICHARDS

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NEW YORK 1932

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To

JAMES FORSAITH RICHARDS

My Father

Physician of Body and Spirit

By unassisted study he read both testaments
in the original tongues while he proclaimed
their highest teachings in his life

FOREWORD

This volume began in the thought that a treatment of the writings of the New Testament somewhat like the treatment here given Matthew might be stimulating to preachers. But as the volume has slowly grown, some readers of the manuscript have suggested it may have a yet wider appeal to those who desire short devotional readings to use privately or in small groups.

The book is not a commentary. Neither is it an effort to make preaching easy. If it stimulates readers to their own appreciations of Jesus and his meanings, the author will be grateful.

First Church Parsonage, Oberlin
January, 1932

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WINDOWS IN MATTHEW

Feet in the Dust

Matthew 1:17: All the generations.

Forty-two are mentioned in this verse and they reach only back to Abraham. How many were there before that? Whatever the answer, the picture remains clear. However high the mountain towers, its roots are in the common plain.

This is the first thing to know about Jesus. It was the first thing his fellows knew. For thirty years it seems to have been about all they knew. Many never knew more. He entered our world through the portals of a human home, romped with the other children, grew in wisdom and stature, worked at household and village tasks, attended the local church, went into a local business, was weary and hungry and tempted in all points like as we are.

This is precious. If his feet were not in the dust of our common path, he would be too unrelated to us to have much meaning. If the mountain had no roots in the plain, we could not climb even its lower slopes. It was to retain the humanity of Jesus that many of the fiercest theological battles of the early church were waged. Had they been lost, we should have lost him.

He towers. He towers highest of all. He towers till his summit is lost in clouds and distances our sight does not pierce. His summit pierces heaven. Even thought has difficulty in tracing the relation of the base and the peak. But he starts where we

start. This is precious—essentially and infinitely precious.

New Joy

Matthew 2:10: And when they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

It was not their star nor did they make it gleam. But they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

So the Christian makes all that is good his happiness. The joy of the stars is his. You sing with Paul as he beacons the darkening days of the Roman Empire; with Francis, talking with the birds about Assizi and teaching men to be God's jugglers in the joy of high religion; with Livingstone, threading the Dark Continent with light; with Pasteur, beating back the confines of disease and death; with Froebel and all true educators, releasing the spirit of childhood; with all in settlements and societies who are toiling for a fairer human life; with every idealist in business or politics who is not for sale because he belongs to God.

The joy of the stars is yours.

New Anger

Matthew 2:16: Then Herod . . . was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the male children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the borders thereof.

A strange contrast! To the shepherds and the magi, the coming of Jesus meant joy. To Herod, it meant anger that led to violence.

It was prophetic. The child was "set for the falling and rising of many in Israel" and everywhere. To the seeker he brings joy; to the content, anger. To those who want a star to guide them out of their evil ways and to lead society to a fairer life, he is welcome. To those who love their sins and are content with the social iniquities that are comfortable and profitable for them, he is an enraging menace. So was it at the first and so shall it be till the Kingdom has fully come.

Choosing a Home

Matthew 2:22–23: He withdrew into the parts of Galilee, and came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth.

As one destined to grow in wisdom and stature, Jesus must have been deeply influenced by this place of residence that Joseph chose for him. Luke also suggests that the roots of the family were not here but in Judea. However heartily we believe Jesus would have been Jesus anywhere, the home environment must have done much to give form to his thought and interest. Nazareth was serving him while quite unaware that he was making it immortal.

We know from the later jeers of Jesus' enemies that his home town was despised. Did that very fact quicken his interest in all despised and lowly folk?

Though itself hidden in a ring of hills, Nazareth required but a few minutes of rambling to bring its boys out on the plain of Esdraelon where the caravans of Egypt and Asia were passing in endless succession. A somewhat longer walk afforded a glimpse of the salt Mediterranean. How much may such experiences have helped the growing lad toward a sense of the bigness of the world and the reality of humanity that presaged his later bursting of the bonds of Jewish exclusiveness?

A few minutes' climb in yet another direction brought him in sight of the eternal snows of Mt. Hermon. Can his poetic spirit have missed the suggestiveness of this? How often later he withdrew to high land for his devotions!

Humility, humanity, sublimity—these were voices of the environment Joseph chose for Jesus. Did he not choose well? Are we as wise for our children?

Jordan Hours

Matthew 3:16: He saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon him.

The experience was probably private to Jesus. Mark, the oldest account, gives no hint of anything being visible or audible to the by-standers. Nor does Matthew—"The heavens were opened *unto him.*" "*He* saw." Nor does Luke, although Luke has the dove "in bodily form."

What then? Outwardly the baptism is Jesus' identification of himself with the best religious movement of his time. Inwardly, and more significantly, it is a private religious experience known to others only as later he told it to his friends.

Jesus grew in wisdom as well as in stature. He had to *learn,* even as do we. Most of all—as with us—he had to discover his relationship to God and the place among men that God wanted him to take. The discovery came during an act of consecration. It came privately. He felt God's presence pressing down upon him—but gently, as a dove alights. He knew God speaking within him, approving his past and inviting him to unbroken and ever deepening fellowship.

Historically the experience was unique. But the uniqueness lay in the purity of heart that Jesus brought to the experience and the completeness of the response that he made. It did not lie in the form of the experience. There are few without similar experiences, although in our lesser lives they may be less intense and our responses less complete. But we too have our Jordan hours—when we identify ourselves with the best we know, or see Mount Ranier in the moonlight, or pick a primrose, or pray, or feel the world's woe sweep over us, or are invaded by great friendship, or stand before Jesus as he did before John. God presses on us—gently as a dove alights, but as certainly as on Jesus—inviting

to unique, unbroken, growing intimacy. What of our response?

Higher Temptations

Matthew 4:1: Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.

The leadership was different from that in the preface to many temptations. Often the devil is at both ends of a temptation. Here the Spirit was at one.

Jesus was just from his baptism where his intimacy with God had been deepened and the greatness of his mission implied. Whether or not he yet framed that mission in Messianic terms, the baptism experience must have made him feel it was to be surpassingly great. But what *was* surpassing greatness with God? The inner intimacy and the outward task must harmonize. The world, the Jewish church, personal comfort and aggrandisement, were all ready to suggest form and method for his mission. It is always that way. But for him the inner and the outer must harmonize, must be of one piece. The Spirit led him to the temptation.

Many are the movements that start from some pure insight and that then through compromise in their expression lose all their original spirit and worth. The transformation of Paulinism from ethical mysticism into forensic formalism, the gap between the first and the later Franciscans, for in-

stance. But individual histories tell the same story. Love tries to use force—and usually ceases to be love. Spiritual purposes use non-spiritual means—and the spirit flees.

In the wilderness at least three inadequate and improper expressions of his mission made appeal to Jesus. Each was put by. Thus was he preserved to his true method that was consonant with his inner intimacy with God, the method of serviceable, sacrificial love.

How much we need this driving of the spirit into the wilderness that we may emerge purged of compromise and concession and with our outward living made harmonious with the best within!

The Right Order

Matthew 4:3: And the tempter came and said unto him, If thou art the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.

Of course. Those times, like our own and like most others, were of a sort to make this temptation inevitable. Jesus was wrestling in loneliness with the question how he was to fulfil the sense of unique, God-given mission that had come to him so vividly at his baptism. The times shouted to him, "Be princely, avoid work, be rich and luxurious, turn stones to bread." The Messianic role, which was the highest his times could think and which he was very likely already contemplating, was in its popu-

lar acceptance a role just like that. Only in its more rarefied form did the Messianic hope remember the ideal of the suffering and sacrificing servant.

No temptation is more characteristic of our time. Leisure first—then service. Riches first—then charity. Possessions first—then condescension. Security first—then patronizing benevolence. My pile first—then I will love my poor neighbors. It is of the devil.

Jesus might have taken that way. The choice for him was just as real as it is for us. His temptation was no play acting. It was real. He could have yielded. Then we might have had another Judas Maccabaeus—but not Jesus Christ. Neither personal comfort nor the voice of the times could deflect him from God's method—toil, the eating of his bread at the same hard cost as was laid on others, self-identification with "the least of these", risk, sacrifice, and—!

He was alone in the wilderness with God, but our path often lies through that same wilderness and, as with him, our whole lives and total meaning to the world are all involved.

Food Enough

Matthew 4:4: Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

The multiplication of wealth and the increase of religion here came into sharpest competition. Which

should Jesus do? In which are our times most interested? Both are good. The hunger of Jesus interpreted to him the hunger of the multitude. For that hunger he often showed concern and to relieve it he more than once took practical measures. Then why not be one to turn stones into bread? One able to do it then would receive much the same acclaim as would one able to do it now. How our churches would compete for his patronage and our commencement platforms for his words! But Jesus, after much reflection, chose the increase of religion first. Why?

Had he already read the misery of the rich? Their frequent bitter loneliness? The pains of envy from which they so often suffer? Their common bankruptcy of all interior joy and resource? Had he therefore come to doubt all aspiration for bread, whether the richest nation is therefore any happier, whether wealth is not a peril?

Or had his thinking touched a deeper level? Did he see that the multiplication of wealth is not the real problem at all? Multiply it and the few will still get most of it and many still hunger as before. The real problem is its distribution and that is a moral problem.

There is bread enough. As I write, wheat is very low. The problem that presses is that of too much food. At the same moment charity funds run low —there are so many hungry. It is literal fact that any man who knew how to turn stones into bread

and did it would be held a public enemy. It is equally a literal fact that if men lived by the words that proceed out of the mouth of God—justice, stewardship, fraternity—no decent man, woman or child, would go hungry.

Splendor

Matthew 4:6: If thou art the Son of God, cast thyself down.

This is closely parallel to 4:3, but the voice of the times and the instinctive human impulse speak in another key. It is the key of splendor. Should not a great one be princely, be brilliant and amazing? Jesus had to think of this. But his answer was negative. He was to seek neither form nor comeliness. Many were to be astonished at him, but not because of any safe leap from the temple pinnacle. Rather because his visage and form were so marred, so wounded and bruised for the transgressions and iniquities of men. The princely role was put aside. Jesus knew and loved true beauty, but royal splendor was not for him nor the illusion of worth that splendor creates in other minds. Here is a prophecy of his later sparing use of the miraculous and his repeated request that his wonderful deeds be kept secret. Spiritual worth is authenticated in but one way—by character and spirit. Nothing else could be true to Jesus' intimacy with God. Once again, in ultimate crisis, Jesus was saved to us.

How this searches us with our lust for fashion, love of display, desire to impress, anxiety as to what others think and say about our clothes, our houses, our cars! Let life be beautiful. But when splendor becomes a motive in church or persons, we suffer a defeat where Jesus was victorious.

Out and Out

Matthew 4:9: And he said unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.

The general situation is again the same as in 4:3. Jesus has put aside the temptations to luxury and splendor as inconsistent with his consciousness of God and the mission to which that consciousness moves him. He has thereby left himself in position to follow the method of serviceable and sacrificial suffering that is to make him the rebuilder of mankind and our clearest revelation of God. But might there not be some temporizing? Was it expedient to be extreme? Might he not get further by some little reverential nod to Satan? Then he might vault into worldly authority and power and afterward use them to good ends.

No, not Jesus. God is a jealous God. In uttering God to the world there is no middle ground. Any half measure would give the whole game away. There is no compromise here. The compromiser is full traitor.

D. L. Moody used to say he was looking for men ready to be branded "O and O"—"Out and Out". That is what God was seeking in the wilderness long ago. He got it then. That is what God seeks still —*now*.

Fishers Still

Matthew 4:19: Come ye after me, and I will make you fishers of men.

That way of putting it must have meant a lot to Simon and Andrew. Jesus was asking a revolutionary change. Yet much of the old was to be taken over into the new. They were to be fishers still.

Jesus is revolutionary still. But of most he asks not so much a change in the form of their work as a greatening of its objective. If you are teaching, keep at it. But beyond the teaching of your subject become a teacher of persons. Are you doctoring? Very well. It is a noble profession. But do you see it as a dealing with cases or as a dealing with humans? Your lawyering,—is its chief passion to make men and their affairs more just and kindly? Finance, loaning and borrowing, trading in credit—are you using these to make men more creditable? Manufacturing has three results—the making of goods, the making of profits, the making of men. The last is by far the most important. Do you put it first? Legitimate trade increases values by rearranging possessions into places where they

are more useful. Are you in it for the sake of improving personal life? Preaching—is it self-display, or oratory, or pleasing the hearers? Or is it catching men for God?

Is your calling capable of being usefully personalized? If not, get out of it or say good-bye to Jesus Christ. If it is, to personalize it is the one thing Jesus asks of you.

Staying in the Church

Matthew 4:23: Jesus went about in all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues.

Jesus was so at variance with official religion that it at last egged Rome on to killing him. Yet it was within its buildings and at its meetings that he began his ministry. He stayed there so long as he was allowed. Paul and others did just the same thing later.

How long should one stay in an imperfect institution? Is it better to work from within or attack from without? If one has to shift from the former to the latter method, how choose the time? And would the same principles apply to different organizations—Tammany Hall, a political party, a country, the Church? Do not unworthy motives, like the love of personal prominence, often hasten the decision to leave, and the fear of ridicule delay the decision? What is the principle and where is the line?

The Church is cheated by some going too soon and hurt by others staying too long.

Happy Spirits

Matthew 5:3: Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Do not forget that the word translated "blessed" might be translated "happy." No doubt it would be if happiness were not so often thought of in trivial and even bogus ways. Jesus speaks now of a happiness too great and lofty for any ordinary word to tell it.

It is the happiness of those who are not puffed up, are bothered by no place or station that they must at all costs maintain, are free from all concern about the best seats at the table or in the church, are rid of any necessity of comparing the social treatment they get with the treatment given others, spend no time at all trying to grade themselves on the social ladder, can be socially outshone without a qualm or quiver, care nothing about having their names in the papers. Aware of little desert in themselves, any kindness shown them fills their whole universe with light. Demanding nothing as a right, all gifts to them seem like a royal bounty. Instead of seeking the last word, they are of a teachable disposition and things that are hidden from the wise and understanding are revealed unto them. Instead of

being over-confident, they know their need and even little children throng to bring them help. Aware of their emptiness, they set no stops to the sustaining fellowship that men and God are forever offering us all but that only the poor in spirit are wise enough to take. Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

A Secret Society

Matthew 5:4: Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

It is no beatitude for stones. They cannot mourn. Neither can its secret appear to half-baked men. They do not mourn either. They may wince when they are hurt and pity themselves tremendously. They may turn green with envy. But these attitudes are far less than mourning. Jesus had no promise of comfort for them. There is no reward in them. There is no comfort till we leave them.

Mourning is not so selfish. Self may be involved. Indeed, it always is. But mourning takes in more than self. It is *for* somebody. It is social. It is other-pity. It does not grow out of a hurt finger or a damaged pocket. It grows out of a wounded heart. It is here the promise of Jesus applies.

At first it seems hard that personality is so accurately measured by the capacity to suffer. Only the noble can greatly grieve. But when one rises above all selfish complaint, all envy and self-pity, and learns genuinely to mourn, something mystic hap-

pens. It is like the Northern Lights. Something luminous steals through the dark.

> "The half of music, I have heard men say,
> Is to have grieved."

I find this ineffable, but I have seen it. I have seen the meeting of great and noble sufferers and sensed a comradeship denied to those who know no kindred pain. Perhaps comradeship is the best word we can find for it. There is an exalted secret society whose password is to have suffered generously and well. Nothing can ever break that fellowship. No one qualified is ever blackballed there. The greatest of all time are members and multitudes all unsung. Jesus is a member, who "for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross." God is a member, without whom no sparrow falls to the ground and from whom no one turns away except to be followed by Him in pain. Said a young man returned from the trenches in France, "I used to pity Jesus. I do so no more. Now I envy him. I wish all the woe of the world could be rolled in one bundle and laid on me." He understood.

Joy Through Forgetting

Matthew 5:5: Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

Humility is not thinking ill of oneself. It is not thinking of oneself at all. Go into the sea with the

fear of sinking, and sink you will. Forget all about it and it takes little or no effort to keep up. The water does it. You inherit the ocean.

In a room full of people how easily some get on. You envy them and strive for their success. But the harder you strive the worse is your failure. You are thinking of yourself. They have forgotten themselves completely—and inherited the whole company.

Phillips Brooks once said that the thought of whether he is doing well or ill never enters a preacher's mind without injuring the sermon. In great public speech of any kind the speaker is but a voice. His utterance comes not from him but through him. Even the hearers forget him who has long since forgotten himself. I know a rarely gifted man who has two styles of writing and speaking. One style keeps me forever conscious of him and aware he is conscious of himself. The other makes all forget him because he has done it first. I believe that by keeping to the latter style he could long since have inherited America.

But to try to be meek for the sake of the inheritance is to be the very opposite of meek. You forget yourself by remembering the room full of people and your privilege of contributing to their delight. You forget yourself even before the great congregation or the reading public only when you have been claimed and mastered by a vision of the truth. Let a sublime purpose or majestic cause

humble you that it may flow through you—and the world is yours.

A Door Open

Matthew 5:6: Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

It is said that when Nathaniel Shaler, the great Dean of the Scientific School at Harvard, used to have young men come to him in perplexity about their life plans, he would ask them, "What do you want to be?", and whatever they answered he would reply, "Be that." So great was his faith that dominant desire can be fulfilled.

Jesus went even deeper. He talked not of vocations, but of character. You can be the character you want to be. There are many hopeless desires—for possession, for skills, for knowledge, yes, for vocations after a certain age is passed. But there is one place where the door is always open. Not only is there nothing that can deny us this door but the closing of other doors is in itself a call to this door. The meeting of disappointment is a wide door to character. Everything is grist for this mill, absolutely everything—both defeat and victory, loss and gain, temptation and moral advantage, failure and success, poverty and wealth, grief and joy. You cannot name or imagine a situation that is not an opportunity for character. The best is always possible.

Only for you it must really be counted best. You must hunger and thirst after it. Jesus does not talk about you dreaming of righteousness and getting an idle (and weakening) thrill out of picturing yourself as a saint. He does not speak of wanting to be as good as is consistent with 10%. He uses the strongest language possible. You must want it as men hunger—hunger, for which a man will toil every hour he can steal from sleep! You must want it as men thirst—thirst, for which a man with swollen tongue and cracked lips will stumble over a burning desert till he drops! For such wanting, the best is always possible. He shall be filled.

Exultant Safety

Matthew 5:7: Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

When a class is about to break up and leave school for the greater world, it often appoints one of its members to write a class prophecy in which the future of each member of the class is boldly foretold. In the beatitudes Jesus was making such a forecast for folk as he saw them. Who knows that in each case he did not have definite men and women in mind and was congratulating them because of the good things he saw ahead of them?

So as he looked among the friends and acquaintances clustered about him, he saw some of compas-

sionate disposition. Any group is to be congratulated that has such folk within it. But this time Jesus spoke directly to the compassionate ones themselves—"I congratulate you. I foresee that you are going to find this a compassionate world."

Cruelty begets an answering cruelty. The cruelty of the French kings is the major explanation of the terrors of the French Revolution. The whirlwind of cruelty that swept away the Tsars and their minions and even their church had been industriously sown. Censoriousness will quickly set folk to the easy task of picking flaws in you. But mercy "blesseth him that gives" as well as "him that takes."

The first great government that diverts the funds now lavished on armies and navies into channels of constructive international good-will and mercy will be the first really safe great government on earth. Jesus was a statesman—almost the only one the world has yet seen.

The man who lives in constant and spontaneous mercifulness lives also in perpetual surprise at the generosities of judgment and the torrent of kindnesses that humanity pours back on him.

Nor does Jesus confine his forecast to the ground. He lifts it to the skies. Not only through time but also through eternity he foresees but one fate for the compassionate. When he sees them standing in the great judgment scene they need bring but one thing with them in order to hear, "Come ye blessed

of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." That one thing is mercy—a compassion so large, so genuine, so habitual that those who wear it are unconscious of its worth, its power to link them and God.

Clear Eyes

Matthew 5:8: Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

There is need enough to have the life and the mind and the heart purged of carnal conduct and imaginings and passions. But, without forgetting that, Jesus is thinking of something more positive. It is the life and mind and heart that are single in their devotion to God. Such a heart is clean, but it is more. It is eager, it is questing. It gazes steadfastly only in one direction.

Such a heart notices what others miss. It reads the orderliness of the universe as the habits of the divine mind. It hears the groaning and travailing of the whole creation as a waiting for the revealing of the sons of God. For it the morning stars sing together. It sees the evolutionary process not as frightful or meaningless but as God-actuated, God-pulled.

Even in the presence of evil such a heart sees God. Its very protest against social wrong and its disgust with the evil ways of men are born of a per-

ception that these things are against God and God is against them. Even in dissipation it sees men fumbling after a fulness of life that only God can give. Even vices speak to it of man's homesickness after God and so add new meaning to that home.

I have read somewhere of a Mohammedan tradition that Jesus and the apostles once walked past the carcass of a dead dog and that when his friends said, "How bad is its smell," Jesus said, "How white are its teeth."

Getting Into the Family

Matthew 5:9: Blessed are the peace makers: for they shall be called sons of God.

Pupin says the history of the universe is the emergence of order out of chaos. You can see it in the first crystallization, in the appearance of plant life, in the development of animals, in the growth of man, in the fabrication of societies—family, clan, tribe, state, empire, a dawning international order. Whitehead arrives at a "principle of concretion"—loose and unrelated items are being bound together. Wieman discerns a "process of integration," ever more complex, inclusive and complete. By different paths men journey toward the one conclusion that the nature of things is to move toward peace. Religion lifts the thought yet higher. God is a peacemaker. God is love. Therefore those who help

bring order out of chaos, who harmoniously relate heretofore unrelated items, who further the process of integration, are related to the deepest reality of the universe. "Every one that loveth is born of God."

But not to fight is not enough. This beatitude is for the aggressive. It is for those who create peace, who seek unity in difference, who feel after the common interests of the contenders and the harmonies for which the very discords exist. To labor expensively that the very contrasts between persons and nations and races may become the ground and means of their cooperating for a common good higher and richer than they can ever know so long as they remain in opposition, is to be a son of God.

Present Tenses

Matthew 5:10: Blessed are.

There was plenty of futurity in Jesus' teaching. It reached even beyond the world. But teachers serve him ill when they emphasize things to be to the exclusion of his exultation in the present. Looking out on men deeply enmeshed in an ill-made world, Jesus put all the congratulations of the beatitudes in the present tense. This one, as none preceding it, is addressed to such as have found the world not only ill-made but aggressively hostile. Yet it is in the present tense. "Blessed *are*."

What a day it will be when all churches and all Christians can thus voice their religion in the present tense! How much of what is now future dream will become contemporary reality!

The Enviable Wounded

Matthew 5:11: Blessed are ye when men shall reproach you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

This is one of the strangest of fortunes for which to offer congratulations. To come into even distant sight of the meaning of the sentence we must climb to its full height. We have not done that till we have noticed that the evil speaking is to be false, which suggests that the reproaches and persecutions are to be equally undeserved. It is all unjust—and is not injustice hard to bear? We say we could stand such things, if only we deserved them. But when we don't—! Nor have we scaled the height of the sentence till we have read the last three words, "for my sake." These unmerited troubles have come upon us because of a great loyalty, the best loyalty of our lives. Then Jesus congratulates us.

Why? Is it that such hammerings will sharpen and harden character into its best shapes? Does not a virtue that suffers unjustly find the experience maturing? Is it that such treatment of our loyalty purifies it, refines out its dross? Is it that

such counter-attack makes us sure our virtue is not blushing unseen but has reached the front line trenches where things are done and issues settled? Is it—as the next verse suggests—that such sufferings are the only path into a great and precious fellowship with the prophets and apostles and martyrs of all ages, of every good cause, in every culture? Is it what Jesus was not yet ready to say although he mentioned it later and great spirits have again and again discovered it—that unjust suffering because of loyalty to him brings us most intimately close to him where we can peer into his heart as from no other vantage ground?

Asepsis

Matthew 5:13: Ye are the salt of the earth.

From that day to this, but more in that than in this, salt has been a great aseptic and preserver. It has kept plain foods sweet and wholesome.

It is a great function for any man or woman. It is rather different from our heats of reform, our crusades, our strenuous service, our self-conscious and often proud efforts to "do good" to people. However necessary these other things are, this often outweighs them all in the final reckoning of a well-lived life. There are those whose mere presence keeps the conversation from even feeling any downward drag from the regions of sweetness and light,

makes fault-finding and the mere reporting of evil seem altogether out of place. There are those just to meet whom is to hear a bugle rousing all our latent courage and hope. Just to be in the room with some is to have all that is wholesome in us called to expression. With no effort on their part at all, they arrest the decay of our natures and preserve the virtue that the world was beginning to take away. Without even speaking to us they tell us that we are children of God and joint heirs with Christ. They are aseptic and preservative—the salt of the earth.

Anchors

Matthew 5:13: If the salt have lost its savor, wherewith shall it be salted?

This does not go so far as the story of the unclean spirit returning to his house and discovering it empty and hastening to find a whole brood of other evil spirits to enter there and make the house worse than ever. The picture here is not of the very pernicious but just of those who once were full of savor and now are savorless. But they make one of the bitterest problems of our churches and of the whole Christian movement. See L. P. Jacks' booklet on "The Lost Radiance of the Christian Religion."

The cause of the Church is hurt quite as much by the dead wood within as by frank and active opposition without. One knows what to do with the

latter, but as to the former—"wherewith shall it be salted?" You can deal with an avowed foe on the basis of reality, but a friend who has gone cold, yet still poses as a friend, is hardest to reach. He does not let you stand on the facts. You can't even get under way. Persons who used to be engines but have turned into anchors delay the voyage more than adverse winds and currents.

Dead Wood

Matthew 5:13: It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men.

The problem of church discipline is one of the hardest we have. The difficulty is real and deep because the exercise of discipline involves an assumption of superiority and an ability to judge one's fellows. The more mature a Christian is the more he shrinks from making such assumptions. Think how long Jesus kept Judas among the Twelve! Moreover the matter is further complicated by the fact that although overt acts can be roughly measured, inner attitudes cannot be so treated. And one of the strongest insistencies of Jesus was that it is only in the inner region that men ought to be measured.

Yet happy is the minister who does not have to know that it would vastly strengthen his church if some of its members could be cast out, and blind

is the Christian who does not know that the churches would be vastly improved if some of their ministers could be cast out!

Most churches have some rude criteria by which absent members can automatically remove themselves from the rolls. Perhaps some spiritual genius will sometime devise mechanisms by which resident members will do the same. If the method is true to the mind of Jesus, at once so austere and so patient and compassionate, it will make for reality all around.

The Coat Closet

Matthew 5:15: Neither do men light a lamp, and put it under the bushel.

The modern equivalent is forgetting to turn off the light in the coat closet! When next you open it and calculate the hours of wasted current, your feelings are not fit for publication. That, however, is mistake. To leave it on deliberately would be unthinkable.

Seeming As Good As You Are

Matthew 5:16: Even so let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

Does that sound strange from one who so often warned against display—being seen to pray, letting

one hand know the good deeds of the other? Then note two things.

There is here no sanction of display that men may praise me. It is that men may glorify God.

The light is to shine "even so." How? It is not to be waved around or stuck in front of people's noses. It just quietly sits on the stand where it belongs.

I have read—where was it?—about "seeming as good as you are." Religion is hurt by those who try to seem better than they are. But there is another sort of hypocrisy that at times appears actually to hurt it more—that of trying to seem worse than we are. You see it in its cruder forms when a man caught in obscene or profane or just mercenary company will laugh at what really disgusts him, dip into language that makes his tongue smart, talk as if he really believed the only values and motives of life are economic,—just not to seem different! You see it in forms just as damaging when men leave the kind, true word unspoken, the affectionate deed undone, for fear some one will think them good. There is little enough good in any of us. But if Christians would just stop hiding the good there is, without any pride or boasting would just "let" it shine, would dare to uncover their consciences and "let themselves go" along the paths of their best impulses, the cause of righteousness and truth would be immeasurably strengthened. Try it. That glorifies God.

Looking Both Ways

Matthew 5:17: Think not that I came to destroy the law and the prophets: I came not to destroy but to fulfil.

The effective life is delicately balanced between the past and the future. This saying looks in both directions.

In the days when they were much aloft sailors had an adage to the effect that one must not let go with one hand till one has hold with the other. It is good advice for our iconoclastic times. We are children of the past. To think all our predecessors fools is to show that we are. Destroy history and we are beasts again. The alchemists forerun the chemists. The astrologers forerun the astronomers. Moses and Hosea and Isaiah forerun Jesus. The Roman church foreruns the Protestant. The most out-moded doctrines had roots in genuine experience and the most out-moded precepts rested on sincere consciences. Destruction is often easy but always dangerous.

Don't destroy. Build. The workmen left in the ground the wooden forms that shaped my concrete drive. The drive is hardened now. The forms will rot away of themselves. The concrete stays. The ethnic faiths are all sincere. Do not criticize or attack them. Acquaint them with one who can fulfil their deepest longings. Most men are sincere. Even the libertine is after fullness of life. Don't judge him. Show him the One who can really integrate and satisfy.

Exploration

Matthew 5:20: Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of Heaven.

And the scribes and Pharisees were the moral leaders in the most moral nation of the time. Not only has investigation shown that they were better men than one would conclude if one learned of them only through the New Testament, but the New Testament makes it abundantly clear that if we had visited Jerusalem at the opening of the first century, they were the people we should have wanted to meet, by whom we should have wanted to be entertained. They were on top of their world and set the pace for their society. We might even have felt that Jesus was needlessly harsh.

Was he so harsh because of the mercenary element in the teaching of these leaders? They said that the perfect keeping of one Sabbath would issue in the Messianic age—which age they conceived in selfish rather than in spiritual ways. The goodness that could be bought and sold never interested Jesus —though it does many of us.

Or did Jesus speak this way of the popular righteousness because it was so external, lived so much by rule and rote? That of Jesus came welling from within like a song from a poet's heart. How constantly Jesus reiterated this distinction.

Or was it the frozen respectability of the scribes and Pharisees that offended Jesus? They felt all

virtue had already been discovered and that they could perfectly describe it. Jesus was teaching an explorative, adventurous righteousness.

Or was it for all these reasons together?

And in how many ways economic, political, social, would Jesus find us standing in our day precisely where the scribes and Pharisees stood in theirs?

A New Direction

Matthew 5:22: "But I say unto you."

Five times it appears in the Sermon on the Mount —and it is implied in every paragraph.

What a self-consciousness it reveals—fearless, radical, authoritative! And authority of what a sort!

How it declares morality cannot be static and done! All the precepts from which it marks a transition to something higher were in their time advances from something less perfect. Not to kill was better than murder, fidelity better than adultery, truth under oath better than no truth at all, only one eye for an eye and one tooth for a tooth better than unlimited revenge, love for one's neighbor better than loving none. But that the Jews had obtained the highest moral development of the time was not enough. Morality must *keep* developing.

And note the direction. It is from emphasis on faults that are in general visible and easily described and punished toward emphasis on those that are

less visible, hard to describe and difficult of punishment. Nothing is more characteristic of Jesus. The earlier is not abrogated. The new includes it and does so in the only way that can ever fulfil it.

The law has always to emphasize the more easily detected and described. Only so can the courts operate. When they do regard motive it is primarily as evidence for or against the probability of the overt act, not as of worth in itself.

Jesus and the religion that is true to him approach the matter from the opposite direction. Hence their difficulty and their thoroughness.

Teeing Off

Matthew 5:22: Whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of the hell of fire.

There is a theory of the emotions according to which we do not run away because we are scared but are scared because we run away. Whether or not this theory can be consistently carried through, it is certain enough that our initial handling of any situation is of supreme importance.

No one starts out to be a murderer. It is not only that the gallows and the electric chair stand waiting today as outside Jerusalem there waited the deep valley of Hinnom where refuse fires were always burning and where the bodies of executed criminals were thrown as carrion. It is that no one really wants to be a murderer. Yet if we allow our anger

the least expression, we are on the path. Anger feeds on expression. To say, "Thou fool," does not relieve it but increases it. Had Jesus seen that in some street brawl? First an insulting word, then a jostling, then a blow, then a stab, and then—the Gehenna of fire. Jesus knew whence big oaks come.

Through all this chapter Jesus dwells on this sequence. On the golf course of character the match is won not on the eighteenth hole, but on the first.

Seven Days Later

Matthew 5:23–24: If therefore thou art offering thy gift at the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave thy gift before the altar, and go thy way, first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

Jesus had little to say about raising budgets either for church support or for benevolence. Moreover, when he came nearest to this subject it was to speak a language all his own.

Imagine this sentence read some Sunday morning in one of our churches just before the plates are passed. Imagine more than that. Imagine it obeyed! What would that do to the congregation in the church? What would it do outside the church?

Look at that woman walking down the aisle. She remembers now how tartly she spoke to her maid this morning. There goes a good man who yesterday drove into an irritably slow foursome ahead of

him on the golf course. He recalls now that those men ahead never had his leisure to perfect their game. See that man making for the door to seek the workmen he has embittered by a labor policy that puts profits above humanity. Watch that editor hurrying to his office to revise an editorial destined to appear tomorrow, in which he has used the terms "Dago" and "Wop" and "Nigger." There goes a man who recently bought a block of stock because he had inside information about an approaching "melon" that the sellers did not have. That youth is in such a hurry because last night he escaped dancing with a colorless girl. He might have drawn her out instead of wounding her shy spirit. And the preacher is going too! Why, oh why, was he so critical of some of his flock last week and so negligent of some who feel outside the sweet and gracious contacts of society?

The church is emptying. But how I would like to be there next Sunday morning! And how I would like to see the face of the treasurer when he goes to the bank on the following Monday!

Electricity

Matthew 5:28: Every one that looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.

Electricity is a blessing. It gives light and warmth and power. But its blessing depends on

its being confined to proper circuits. It is always pressing to leave them. Let it find a cross circuit and it becomes almost the most terrible thing on earth. Then it will burn and blast and slay.

The sex impulse is like that. It can build high romance; help bind souls in the most beautiful of fellowships; serve the fairest thing on earth—a faithful home; bestow loveliness, warmth, power; become a sacrament.

But, like electricity, it must be kept on the right circuit. It is always pressing to leap across somewhere it does not belong. Then its name is destruction. It will burn and paralyze, blast and slay like nothing else. It sears the very heart.

No man is fit to wander in among electric wires and machines who is not wise enough to avoid becoming a cross circuit. He must know how to keep away from bare wires and terminals. Jesus recommends the same strategy for the moral life. He is wise.

Adult Citizenship

Matthew 5:37: But let your speech be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: and whatsoever is more than these is of the evil one.

This paragraph is a perfect example of Jesus' treatment of law and of his idea of virtue as progressive. He would not destroy the law but fulfil it. The law had had good purpose which must never be lost. The laws against perjury were in the in-

terest of truth. Still they were necessary only because of the evil in men. He who has truth in the inward parts will always say Yes when yes is called for and No when no is the truth. For him, all taking of oaths has lost every meaning. The law is fulfilled and so passes away. As soon offer a crutch to a Marathon victor as require him to hold up his right hand and swear.

For most men the laws against homicide have no meaning at all. Most men have an inbred regard for human life that pushes murder outside their capacity. Our moral maturity is measured by the number and importance of the regions in our lives where we need no law.

Genuine Victory

Matthew 5:40: If any man would go to law with thee, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also.

"Passive resistance" is a term of doubtful worth. The adjective is so prominent that it is likely to mislead us. Jesus was not passive in the presence of wrong and he explicitly says he does not want us so. Bitterness, hatred, revenge, he does throw out. But inaction in the face of evil was not his way and he would not have it ours.

If one smite you on the right cheek do not run, and do not revenge, but find a more constructive way of dealing with the evil. If a man impress you to go one mile, don't let the matter end there. Do

not run home in bitterness or try to repay in kind. Repay in the finer coin of kindness that has some chance of bringing your oppressor to his better self. The case calls for more than passivity. It calls for action—but on an elevated level.

Paul was never more true to his Lord than when he wrote, "Overcome evil with good." That is not passivity. That is sublime action.

Liking and Loving

Matthew 5:44: Love your enemies.

Jesus did not say "*Like* your enemies." He was not crazy, though some thought so and some still try to make him so. Jesus did not like his enemies. He did not like the scribes and Pharisees. He did not like the demoniacs. He did not like the later Judas. He did not like the Peter who opposed his highest idealism and cried "Be it far from thee, Lord." In fact he called that Peter, "Satan." He did not like the woman taken in her shame. All these hurt him as only one so sensitive is capable of being hurt. He could not like them. But he could love them, and he did. The deepest root of his blistering woes against the scribes and Pharisees was his concern for them. He loved the demoniacs back to health. He showed good-will to Judas to the very last. His rebuke to Peter was motivated by his care for Peter. Others had liked the woman, but he loved her.

The Christian life soars above all personal tastes, all whims, all likes and dislikes. It is a steady and glad good-will toward even those who outrage our taste, "get our goat," are least like us and most disliked by us. It is this attitude and this conduct even toward those who confront us with unfair competition, outshine us socially, slander our fair names, subtly oppose all our dearest and most righteous plans—our enemies!

This is not insanity. This is Christianity.

Where Do You Grade?

Matthew 5:46: If ye love them that love you, what reward have ye?

Are there not three sorts of people in the world? According to the most significant classification, just three?

The first sort hate those that love them. They are consumers of good will. They draw heavily on the world's supply of forbearance, kindness, service. They are benefited by the sacrificial nobility of the race but instead of returning anything they leave this priceless treasure less than they find it, diminished because they have passed this way. They are dead freight on the hard up-grades that humanity is trying to make. In the banking of humanity they are unfair liabilities.

The second sort are just. They greet all who greet them. They pray for those who pray for them.

They never miss a trick in the "exchange" of Christmas gifts. They punctiliously return all their social obligations. They love those that love them. Life is a fair trade. They are just.

Surely they are better than the first sort. They do not diminish the supply of good-will. They leave it intact. They would scorn to be liabilities in the banking of humanity. But though they carry their own weight in the up-grades that humanity is trying to make, they supply no motive power for the rest of the train. So what reward have they?

If the third sort consumes good-will—as all of us must do—they yet manage to produce more than they consume. They deposit more than they draw. Life is not a trade. It is a creative industry. They are more than just. They greet even the sullen, pray for those who ignore them, give where there can be no return, invite those who cannot invite again, love their enemies. They carry more than their own weight. In the banking of the higher life of the race they are gloriously profitable assets. They have a way of forgetting all about reward. But they have one and it is heavenly.

As

Matthew 5:48: Ye therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

I wonder if the brilliance of the idea of perfection does not blind us to the really important words in this sentence. Taken just by itself the idea of

perfection is blinding, but little more. It always needs definition. "There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars." The exhortation to an undefined perfection either discourages us or rouses a sentimental pride. Neither result is good. It is only when clear content is given to the abstract idea that the exhortation can wholesomely inspire.

So the really important words in this sentence are the words "therefore" and "as." The first links the sentence to its context and the second links us with God. Together they point to the content of the idea of perfection.

Read the paragraph of which this sentence is the conclusion and it will do other than blind us. It will illumine every bit of our social conduct and shine into the most hidden corners of our social feeling and intent. God does not send his sunshine and his rain according as men are just or unjust, evil or good, He sends to all alike. This is his perfection. When we greet our kindred but pass strangers in silence, or love our neighbors and our lovers but are hostile or even merely cold to any beyond that circle, we are not Godlike. When our courtesy leaps across conventional lines, we are Godlike. When our good-will beats down the barriers of the enmities that we encounter or melts the ice of another's indifference, then we are sharing in the perfectness of God. This is no exhortation merely to dazzle us into discouragement or pride,

but a broad, bright highway through life's confusion into fellowship with the Father. Love your enemies—that enemy whose name you know. Pray for your persecutors—that man who yesterday did you a dirty trick. Show good will to those who never show you any. Give cheery greetings to the very next stranger you meet. "Ye *therefore* shall be perfect *as* your heavenly Father is perfect."

The Wrong Audience

Matthew 6:1: Take heed that ye do not your righteousness before men, to be seen of them: else ye have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.

Join the audience and you see the point. You never think of assigning religious value to virtue practiced to impress you. It never reminds you of God. Or if it does it makes you blush to see God so ignored and it embarrasses you to find yourself given the deference that belongs only to God.

Nor is this all. The parade of righteousness has ugly implications. The bid for your admiration puts you in an inferior position. The parader is taking delight in showing that you are less virtuous than he. Nothing whatever could be further from the spirit of Jesus.

The parader of virtue puts you at the same moment both higher and lower than he has any right to do. Then why follow him? We too have audiences.

Recompense

Matthew 6:4: And thy Father who seeth in secret shall recompense thee.

In what way? Surely not in kind. The frequent assurance that in the end our bank accounts will not be any smaller for the charities we practice is a pitiable treason to Jesus. Surely he would say that if they are not smaller we have practiced no true charity. An inexpensive virtue would wake his scorn.

Then how does this recompense come? Is it the deepening of virtuous habit? Is it an enlargement of sympathy which brings an expansion of personality? Is it the joy of having a choice and holy secret shared only with the best of friends? Is it the mysterious sense of cleansing that one utterly unsullied act can send coursing through one's whole being? Is it an exhilarating vision of what all life might be, adequately sustained by inner motive and sublimely free from every kind of social tyranny? Or is it just the secret, ineffable gladness of the Father's approval?

The Inner Door

Matthew 6:6: But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thine inner chamber, and having shut thy door, pray to thy Father who is in secret, and thy Father who seeth in secret shall recompense thee.

One man has testified that he often finds that inner chamber in his hat! Another has found it in

the wild ride of rush hours in the New York subway. It does not have to be physical—though at times it had better be. It may be at the bedside. It may be in the study and at the desk. It may be alone under the stars. It may be in one's hat in crowded Main Street or on the train. You are to find it wherever you can find it. But somewhere find it you must, or you miss the secret springs without which life is parched and sterile.

The minister at church cannot pray in your stead. The real event when the congregation bows is the ascension of prayer from the inner chambers of the worshippers—often helped, but too often hindered, by the spoken prayer of the minister.

We meet those who unmistakably suggest that they have just come from the presence of a surpassingly lofty friend. They have! Hence their serenity and patience and poise and the impression they give, growing out of the sense they have, of being perfectly at home in a universe that to others seems so alien. They have shut all doors to an inner chamber only to find there a secret door opening not upon the world but upon God.

A Prayer Meeting

Matthew 6:9: After this manner pray ye.

To the familiar thought that the free spirit of Jesus was not here descending to the dictation of

any ritual but rather was revealing the manner and breadth of all prayer, a friend has added the suggestion that for Jesus and his friends this was a real act of prayer. He taught prayer, but he did it by actually praying. We do not reconstruct the scene aright if we do it after the analogy of a classroom. Here we have our feet within a temple. We see a group of men standing among the Palestinian hills in a cluster about one who knows the heart of humanity and the heart of the Eternal, and really praying. Perhaps we bow too and join them.

Mount Everest

Matthew 6:9: Our Father.

It is like Mt. Everest. Where is the base of a mountain? We take a train. We exchange train for motor and that, perhaps, for a pack animal. We come to the place beyond which nothing but our own feet can serve us. We call this the base of the mountain. We are wrong. No geographer will reckon the altitude from there. He starts from the level of the world-embracing ocean. No geologist will stop there. He sees the buttresses of this mountain reaching to the ocean floors. Yes, and deeper yet. The whole planet is its base. He knows that if he could measure well he would find evidence of Mt. Everest at every point in the balance of our world. The dust at your own doorstep is the base of Mt. Everest.

Prayer is like that. We take train and car and beast. We think to leave much behind. We narrow our interest to our own feet and fortune, our own weariness and breathlessness and cold and hunger. We say, "Bless me, favor me, advantage me, spare me, single out me, my God,"—my mountain!

Wrong again! We climb alone on our own feet. But prayer is the scaling of the world's desire. It starts in the dust of all the doorsteps. The instant it is touched by any partiality, any exclusiveness, any selfishness, it ceases to be prayer at all. It is ignorance—or blasphemy.

Prayer is like Mt. Everest. "*Our* Father."

Mount Everest Again

Matthew 6:9: Our Father who art in heaven.

It is like Mt. Everest. Mt. Everest never has been scaled. One almost hopes it will not soon be conquered for as it is it stands as an almost perfect symbol of our spiritual state.

The ideal soars above our actual. Mystery caps all we know. The finished towers above our incompleteness. Dream and vision stretch beyond all the sorry history now past. Unsullied purity lies above our stain. Sublimity rebukes our baseness. There is a Name with meaning known in part and in part unknown.

In prayer we turn onward and upward. "Our Father *who art in heaven.*" It is like Mt. Everest.

Reverence

Matthew 6:9: Hallowed be thy name.

Jesus taught a reverence that makes all profanity impossible. But it is tragic not to see that here he is thinking of far more than our longing to be cleansed of dirty oaths. Usage in the Old Testament and in the time of Jesus makes it entirely clear that when Jesus speaks of the "name" he is thinking not of any word for the deity but of the divine nature. We might as well translate, "May thy character be revered."

Do we revere God's character when in our prayers we address him as One needing to be teased by our much speaking, rather than as One more eager than any earthly parents to give good gifts unto their children? Or as One who will make us his pampered favorites, rather than as One equally concerned in the alien and in the worst and the least? Or as One who will for the asking punish our enemies and discomfort our rivals, rather than as the One who is already making his sun to rise on the evil and the good and sending rain on the just and the unjust?

How different our prayers would be if we paused longer on the sentence, "May thy character be revered," and did the rest of our praying in reverence toward that character!

A Dual Prayer

Matthew 6:11: Give us this day our daily bread.

This is a prayer for "neither poverty nor riches." As Benjamin W. Robinson suggests, Jesus may actually have had Proverbs 30: 8 and 9 in mind:

"Feed me with the food that is needful for me:
Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is Jehovah?
Or lest I be poor, and steal,
And use profanely the name of my God."

Here is longing to be free from the degradation and temptation of utter want. But is there not also a prayer for protection against the cloying and arrogance of too great possessions and the power of wealth to separate us both from our fellows and from God?

We pray the prayer in one way. Can we learn to pray it in both?

The Heart of Forgiveness

Matthew 6:15: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

This is no bargain. It is an essential necessity. Forgiveness is not a falsifying of the books. It is no ignoring of the heinousness of sins or easy obliteration of their results. It is the continuation of helpful fellowship with the penitent sinner in spite

of his heinousness and in view of the results, expensive cooperation with him in a new start and his passionate effort to counteract the working of the evil he has done so far as that is in anywise possible. It is dynamic. It is not dishonest. It is honest. It is comradeship in the new situation the sin has produced.

So to forgive is the nature of God. It is so much the nature of God, so much his major interest, that we cannot have that comradeship with Him that is the essence of forgiveness except as we share his nature at this point.

Forgive, in spite of the wrong men do,—even *because* of the wrong men do, seek them out with your expensively assisting friendship, give yourself to help them start anew and to undo all that can be undone of their past evil, face their ruined situation hopefully, constructively, recreatively,—then, you are so sharing in God's major interest that He can come close to you and work with and for you. Otherwise you are setting up barriers to Him that even He cannot disregard.

Secret Hunger

Matthew 6:17–18: But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thy head, and wash thy face; that thou be not seen of men to fast, but of thy Father.

Jesus does not seem to have ranged himself as clearly opposing or favoring the practice of fasting.

He himself came "eating and drinking." But on one point his word is clear. The show of fasting is worse than useless. A published asceticism is perilous. The pity and the praise it wins from observers are stumbling blocks to genuine spiritual development.

Does his spirit suggest more? Though he ate and drank and never saw God as delighting in having his children make themselves needlessly miserable, his was an abstemious life. Luxury does cloy the spirit. That is largely what is the matter with America. Do not most ministers eat lightly Sunday morning?

Again, in our poorly managed world, many have to fast. Golden Rule Sunday put needed coin in the swiftly draining treasury of the Near East Relief. But was there not a yet greater value in the intelligent fellow-feeling it gave us for our many brethren who cry for bread?

Is secret fasting a neglected means of grace?

Purses Which Wax Not Old

Matthew 6:20: Where neither moth nor rust doth consume, and where thieves do not break through nor steal.

It is a question of investment. Invest in clothes and you have to be concerned with cedar chests and moth balls. Invest in steel and you must bother with paint. Invest in bonds and you must rent a

box at the bank. All these things are perilous. Great natural forces and the wickedness of men will be forever threatening to take them away from you.

But invest in truth and the case is altogether different. Nothing can take it away from you. Not even will sharing it make it any less. Learn to see and delight in beauty and you have an incorruptible possession. Invest in love and nothing can rob you of it. You can love even on a cross.

There are treasures over which the law of subtraction has no dominion whatsoever—"the unsearchable riches of Christ." They are incorruptible now and forever. Life is a question of investment. What fools we are!

How to Add Cubits

Matthew 6:27: And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit unto the measure of his life?

Someone has said that there are two things about which we ought not to worry: the things we cannot help, and the things we can!

That is just about the position of Jesus. It is a sad mistake to think that Jesus makes light of diligence. Instead he commends it again and again. Even the birds that neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns are incredibly diligent in gathering daily bread for themselves and their young. Ask any

ornithologist for the figures. Even the lilies that neither toil nor spin are always busily delving in the earth for food and drink. Instead of being anxious about the things they can help, they help them! We humans, on the other hand, waste incalculable time and energy fussing about things that we are entirely able, but too slothful, to correct.

But the main thought just here is that the birds and lilies do not worry about the things they cannot help, and that they come off the better for that fact. In our contrast to that lies one of our most devastating sins of the spirit. The worst thing about such worry is not its uselessness but its destructive waste. It is like the leaking of a steam pipe. The leaking steam is useless. It does not reach the radiator that it ought to warm. It also destroys the plaster and the paper on the walls where it breaks loose. And what a hissing it makes! Most of us run many such pipes. Not only is our worry useless but it debilitates all our living. It makes the soul sick and even opens the door to disease of body and of mind.

The cure? Jesus says the cure is God. Help all the things you can and leave the rest to the Father. He will either help them or give you serene strength to endure them and thereby make them precious factors in your education. Anxiety will add no cubit to the measure of your life. Trusting will add many.

Plural Addition

Matthew 6:33: But seek ye first his kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

"You" is as plural as "ye". The context makes that as clear as does the Greek. Assuredly there is a vast amount of worry about one's private economic prospects that is both silly and ungodly. But although it is unworthy to worry about it, it simply is not true that no single-hearted seeker of his kingdom will ever be in want. Some have starved to death. More will.

Is it not only when we remember the "you" is plural that we understand? God brings forth food enough and provides material for enough clothing. When we cooperatively put his kingdom and righteousness first, the life of society will take such a form that none will any more starve and none any more freeze. Back of the economic problem there is always the problem of character. Solve the second in Jesus' way and the first disappears. Moreover the first problem has no other final answer.

Aristocratic Sin

Matthew 7:1: Judge not.

An aristocratic sin—one of the most aristocratic! But it was of aristocratic sins that Jesus always made the most.

It is startling and ominous that if you are told a man belongs to the intelligentsia you by no means conclude that you will find him a man of exceptional moral enthusiasm. Rather does the term suggest one standing on the side-lines, witnessing and smiling at the hard game the moral heroes of the time are playing. Or if he sits, it is in the seat of the scornful.

There are two ways to read the parable of the prodigal son. One lad walked in the counsel of the ungodly and stood in the way of sinners. The other sat in the scorner's seat. He hugged his sense of superiority. He dressed up the faults of his younger brother to look worse than they really were. He judged. When the story ends with the home full of music and dancing, the elder brother sulks without and of the two is actually further from the father.

How often we feel a secret delight in speaking ill of others! Our judgment gives us a feeling of superiority. How often are we glad and think we are displaying virtue when we discover some undoubted defect in another and find our joy most delectable if that other is superior to us in station or attainments!

But the sins of the cold, proud heart shocked Jesus even more than did the sins of the hot heart.

Beware this aristocratic sin. Judge not!

Reverse Judgments

Matthew 7:2: With what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged.

How many refuse to commit themselves about the concert till they have read the critics in the papers next morning! Then they know which way to turn their thumbs. Oh, yes! But to have judged earlier would have risked giving themselves away.

But elsewhere we cannot escape so easily, nor have we really escaped at the concert. Our judgments always judge us. The man who told Turner he had never seen a sunset such as Turner had painted got the reply, "Don't you wish you could?" Go to the art exhibit to judge the pictures. All the time they are silently judging you.

While we pompously make up our minds about the tariff, it is measuring our economic common sense.

You can't express or have an opinion about the Geneva Conference of 1932 without being judged as to the reality of your devotion to the Kingdom. Judge alien races and your brotherhood is judged.

Will you judge Jesus? The so-called "Trial of Jesus" was really the judgment of Pilate.

The Everlasting Hope

Matthew 7:11: If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?

Not because He is teased to, but because He wants to. Common parents, with all their imperfections, cannot be content not to give good things to their yearning children. The children do not create the compulsion. The compulsion is already in the parents. So does Jesus see God.

This shifts the basis of our hopes. Apply it to the deepest and tenderest hope of all—the hope of immortality. It is not open to proof after the manner of many other things. On this subject experience is silent. Therefore arguments of the ordinary sort are powerless to make it appear either inevitable or impossible. But throw God into the scales. See God as Jesus did. Live with Him somewhat as Jesus did. Consider not so much what we want as what will satisfy a perfect Father. Can He be content to draw our personal lives out of the void only to let them vanish in the dark again? Could a common earthly parent be content with that? How much less can God! Now the scales that ordinary arguments leave balanced tip right up on end. We have a serene faith in the unseen future in close proportion as we know the Father that Jesus can make real to us. This is the end of the whole matter.

In Praise of Narrowness

Matthew 7:14: Narrow is the gate, and straitened the way, that leadeth unto life, and few are they that find it.

The cultivated Englishman has been quoted as saying, "It is worse than wicked; it is vulgar." The cultivated American answers, "It is worse than wicked; it is narrow." This is the day of the cult of breadth.

The breadth that means tolerance of others' opinions, respect for others' standards, reverence for others' personalities, is good. But the breadth that assumes any old opinion is as good as another is murder of the truth. To treat all standards as equally valid destroys morality itself.

I don't want to use a bridge whose engineer has treated Pi as equal to 3. The further the engineer has carried out the decimal, the more narrow he has been, the better I like the bridge. I don't care to hear the pianist who follows McDowell in a broad way, troubled not if many notes are struck sharp or flat. I want my musician narrow. I don't want my banker to have "broad" ideas of honesty.

We stand in bitter need of tolerance and sympathy among religions. But the shallow mood that assumes that no religious truth is true enough to matter is quite off the track. Syncretism is still a poor servant of Christianity. To slough off its accretions is one of the prime needs of our religion. The way forward does not lie in intolerance. But neither

does it lie in blurring the distinction between Jesus and everybody else and everything else. It lies in narrowing down to that distinction. Then Christianity regains its cutting edge. Narrow is the gate.

Genuine Status

Matthew 7:22: Did we not prophesy by thy name, and by thy name cast out demons, and by thy name do many mighty works?

A hard passage for those who base the uniqueness of Jesus on his miracles. Here he talks of others who do miracles and many of them, but do not thereby even get one foot into the kingdom—and he finds some preachers of fine sermons in the same class. His own status is revealed and the status of his followers is gained in quite a different realm—that of motive and purpose. Spontaneous, unrequited love is the only thing of ultimate worth. It may preach fine sermons or be dumb; work surprises or wash dishes. It is the only thing that is real.

Granite

Matthew 7:24: Everyone therefore that heareth these words of mine, and doeth them.

Religion is deed. Whatever else it is will be imperfectly apprehended till we also understand that it is this. Jesus closes the Sermon on the Mount by putting the emphasis right here.

Jesus was the incomparable teacher. Priceless is all he said about the worth of even the least of per-

sons. But this leaps out of the academic into the real when he brushes his friends aside to take little children in his arms and champions one shamed woman till he outfaces all her accusers. Priceless is all he said about hatred carrying self-defeat in its very constitution and love being the only thing that has God completely on its side. But at last we see him silent at his trial and through the mockings and scourgings. Religion is to become a concrete deed.

It is not the business of the church to get itself liked. The business of the church is to make religion a deed whether any one person or any number of persons like it or not.

It is those who in their lives have made religion a deed that have made religion great. And—as Jesus went on to say—it is vain to wait for someone to hand us our religion all solved and demonstrated like a proposition in Euclid, to be learned and then probably forgotten. It is when we hear the words and do them that, instead of feeling our feet caught in the sucking quicksands of doubt, we shall put them down and find them touch granite.

Fundamentalism

Matthew 7:29: He taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.

The contrast is not between the presence of authority and its absence. It is between two kinds

of authority. The scribes were authoritative. They and their ilk had enough authority so that at last they slew this Jesus. But their authority was of quotation and precedent and fine spun argument. It smelt of the lamp. That of Jesus sprang fresh out of the soul of things. It was rooted in experience and so woke an instinctive affirmation in the minds and hearts of his hearers.

That was why the scribal party hated him and that is why he is hated still. After we have made our best arguments to protect ourselves from him, by an appeal that disregards our logic he convinces us against our will. Even after we have proved he is a fool, those words and that face will not leave us. He haunts us. In spite of us, our hearts cling to that which our minds have tried to reject. We hear the voice as it comes floating across the years. We see the face that was lifted up on Calvary. Then from a place deeper than logic can reach, there arises the awareness that he was right and that everybody and everything inconsistent with him is wrong.

It is an authority different from that of the scribes either ancient or modern. We may disregard them. But with him we have got to come to terms. Goethe said there is no protection against virtue except to love it. There is no other protection against him.

Lending a Hand

Matthew 8:3: And he stretched forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou made clean.

Medical diagnosis is now difficult, but the social case is clear. Because of some loathsome skin disease, the man was an outcast—so much so that it took bold courage for him to present himself to Jesus at all. But Jesus swiftly did what no one else would do. He would let no barrier stand between him and need even if all reputable society was building that barrier as high and thick as possible. Indeed, he pushed right through the barrier and did a scandal in all the eyes of the proper—deliberately touched the untouchable and (in verse 4) pointed out his way into social acceptability.

What would that attitude incarnated in all his followers mean today for foreigners and Negroes, for communists, for prostitutes of town and country, for men just out of jail, for boys who don't make the fraternity, for girls who are wallflowers at the dance or never invited?

Grace for Grace

Matthew 8:8: Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof; but only say the word, and my servant shall be healed.

There is a fine delicacy here that we often miss in our admiration for the centurian's confidence. As

a Gentile he comes to a Jew for help, but courteously recognizes that a Jew would not normally be willing to enter a Gentile's house. Jesus graciously allows the man to do him this politeness but yet goes on to show him the supposed barrier is not real, "That many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven."

On both sides, how exquisitely graceful is the incident! Come to Jesus as you honestly think he is and you will find what he really is. You may approach him as a healer of the flesh and find him the food of the soul; as a teacher and find him a friend; as the most beautiful symbol of God and find him the very reality of God.

The Meaning of the Miracles

Matthew 9:6: Arise, and take up thy bed, and go unto thy house.

There is a sharp difference between the Old Testament miracle stories and the works of power wrought by Jesus. Many of the former are destructive—the plagues in Egypt, Uzzah smitten dead for putting forth his hand to steady the Ark of God, the Syrian invaders smitten with blindness, Uzziah attacked by leprosy, Jeroboam's hand withered at the altar. The wonders done by Jesus are pitched in a different key. They are constructive blessings.

They utter the beneficent out-going concern of God.

In this day of marvels the physical wonders of Jesus' career do little or nothing to commend him. But perhaps our emphasis has long been mistaken. See them not as physical demonstrations but as expressions of character, and they gleam with their true significance.

Sharp Eyes

Matthew 9:9: And as Jesus passed by from thence, he saw a man, called Matthew, sitting at the place of toll.

He seems to have been the only one who did see him. Matthew was a publican. Though a Jew, he had entered the employ of the loathed Roman conquerors to help them wring taxes from his countrymen. Moreover it was common for publicans to get their own pay by exacting tribute in excess of what they had to pay to Rome. Therefore when Jews looked into the place of toll they saw a traitor to their race and an extortioner. Jesus saw a man. What a difference that made to Matthew. Jesus was a patriot. Jesus hated dishonesty and unkindness. But beneath all that he despised, he saw a man. Then he lifted the man out of his meanness and set him on the path to become one of the immortal Twelve.

It is possible to look in many places and see nothing but hands for one's factory, mouths to influence

the price of wheat, customers for one's store, passengers for one's railway (I never shall forget one journey when I was treated as a human and not as a mere "fare"), cases for one's doctoring, hearers for one's sermons, votes for one's campaign. Everywhere Matthew is waiting to be really seen. Jesus may see him through us and make him into an apostle.

The Wise Tailor

Matthew 9:16: No man putteth a piece of undressed cloth upon an old garment; for that which should fill it up taketh from the garment, and a worse rent is made.

The patch should be shrunken first. No doubt Mary had taught him that. A wholly new garment would be an even better solution. If rent, it could stand an undressed patch.

What crazy patchwork we do in our character building. We try to patch a little honesty over our deceit, a little kindness over our cruelty, a little generosity over our stinginess. But it does not work for long. As the garment puckers out of shape, so our characters pucker into ridiculousness that is visible to others if not to us. At last there is a tearing and we give up. The fig crop of the thistle pasture has never been a success.

We need the mystic experience of Paul that changes the deepest tastes, to be made honest and kind and generous in our fundamental natures.

Many have found this where Paul did—in a constant inner fellowship with Jesus Christ.

Thronging and Touching

Matthew 9:21: If I do but touch his garment, I shall be made whole.

And she was. Many thronged him. One touched him.

Watch the Easter parade on Fifth Avenue, the tourist crowd at Oberammergau, the opera house packed for Parsifal, the multitudes who think they are Christians because they never robbed a bank or broke up another's home, the church-goers for whom everything is spoiled if the soprano flats or the deacon in the next pew does not make their church-going into a social event, the students of the history of religion who keep it all coldly objective. Many throng him. There are worse things to do. But there is one thing better. This unnamed invalid knew it. Do we? How touch him now?

Keeping One's Eye on the Ball

Matthew 9:30: And Jesus strictly charged them, saying, See that no man know it.

This was increasingly characteristic of Jesus. Often he spoke so. Often he acted to the same end.

He was like—I think Dean Bosworth said this—a surgeon sent to camp with a message of critical importance to the general and to the whole army but so impressed into work for this and that wounded man that he is kept from delivering the message. The good threatens to defeat the best.

Is the modern church in like peril? Clubs, teas, suppers, camps, clinics—they are all good. But do they crowd out the best? The church shares these with other agencies. Its best is its distinctive, unshared mission—the stern call to repentence, the summons to the worship of the Lord our God, the holding up of him who is to draw all men unto himself, the preserving and increasing of the sense of God. This is incomparable. Nothing else is too good to go unsacrificed for this and there is nothing for which this can be sacrificed.

The Rebound of Peace

Matthew 10:13: But if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you.

We don't often do this. There are few things that rile us more than to try to bless people and find them unworthy. One such experience steals all our peace and makes us cynics. Because one poor family, that never had enough opportunity to be clean to make them even distantly aware of its joy, puts coal in the new bath tub, we loudly proclaim

there's no use in any effort to help the masses!

Where would such reasoning have put Jesus? Who ever was worthy of him? But he knew the better way. He let his peace return to himself. Perhaps it is only genuine righteousness that can do that. Surely the righteousness done to be seen of men cannot. So soon as it fails of applause it is bankrupt. But righteousness done out of fellowship with the Father can keep serene however unworthily received. Indeed, the very rebuff from men may serve to deepen the higher fellowship.

Seasoned Service

Matthew 10:16: Be ye therefore wise as serpents, and simple as doves.

This margin translation is clearly an improvement.

Is there in this saying a reflection of Jesus' personal experience? Certainly he was finding that the doing of good is no easy task. Nor can he have failed to see how often well-meaning people accomplish little, or even work harm, when they want to help.

In giving alms it is easy to enlarge a man's purse at the expense of decreasing his more precious self-respect and independence. In extending hospitality it is easy to divert your guests for an hour only to send them away more lonely and dissatisfied than when they came. In giving advice it is easy to invade and violate the freedom of the man who sits

opposite you. The preacher easily takes praise as proof of having served when it may only record that he has confirmed self-righteous hearers in their dead complacency. Nor does the growing complexity of life make the case any easier.

To men going forth with the high resolve to serve, Jesus says, "Be wise." Don't leave your brains at home. You're sure to need them. And, "Be simple." Have a clear and well-considered objective and keep your eye right there. If you get peeved by the discovery that the small change you dealt out to the man who said he was faint for a cup of coffee was spent for liquor, your peevishness shows you were neither wise nor simple. That careless and unthinking gift did not grow out of a pure desire to help but had motives of playing the grand gentleman. If you were simple you would let the experience instruct you. It would announce that "the gift without the giver is bare." Next time you would give your friendship before your coin—or at least, along with it.

The Fellowship of Hate

Matthew 10:22: And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake.

We feel the truth of this as history and take a borrowed pride in the men who have endured the hatred. But is that enough? Is it even worthy? Ought not the saying to make us uncomfortable

as pointing out a lost emphasis in our religion?

We talk of the Christian path as a way of peace and joy. So did Jesus. But do we and he mean the same thing? It is certain he did not mean the bodily comfort and material prosperity in the promise of which some would now see the chief meaning of religion. His promises were pitched in another key. But neither did he mean popularity and fine social standing in terms of which even greater numbers regard religion and the church. It is a shocking moral blindness that thinks the world now grown so good that Christian virtue may be sure of being loved. Fiddlesticks! The Christian pacifists did not find it so during the war. Jane Addams and Graham Taylor have not found it so. Must there not be something very unintelligent in our Christian thinking and very imperfect in our Christian living if we never have the experience of being widely hated for his sake?

Folly

Matthew 10:26: There is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known.

He who found hypocrisy intolerable here shows its folly. It will not work.

We deceive ourselves when we try to deceive others. We deceive ourselves far more than we deceive others. Look out among your acquaintances. Is any sight more common than that of the man

who thinks he is concealing something within himself when all the time that something is shouting from the house-tops to draw the attention of the world? One thinks he has covered his meanness. The fact is the whole town knows it. Another thinks he has hidden his goodness. The fact is he cannot help revealing it even to the little children. We may even hide something so deep within us that it actually passes out of our memory. We simply do not know it any more. That does not keep it from being the one thing by which others remember us. On April first boys like to pin queer objects on the back of another's coat and watch with glee while that other passes down the street unconscious of the show he is making. The plain fact is that every day is April Fool's Day—only we do our own pinning.

Hypocrisy does not work. The only thing that works is a simon-pure sincerity. It is attained only by an heroic self-honesty that welcomes seasoned criticism and constantly lifts us into the light that comes from the conscience of Jesus.

Battle Fields

Matthew 10:28: Be not afraid of them that kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

Today many men are saying that when Christianity ascended the throne of Constantine and be-

came official the cause of real religion suffered a serious set-back instead of the glorious advantage that conventional history still assumes. The reason most often given for this new opinion is that from that time forward Christianity swiftly took unto itself a multitude of accretions by no means in keeping with the spirit of the Nazarene. Perhaps it is even more significant that at that moment Christian living lost much of its sense of danger. When men were killing the body, religion was heroic. After that stopped, religion became tame. The lost radiance, of which L. P. Jacks has written, is largely explained by a lost heroism.

Jesus would have it otherwise. He would see just as much to fear after Constantine as before. For him the greater battleground has never been in the Roman arenas. All that there was especially to fear there is as nothing compared with what there is to fear everywhere. See this, and heroism comes back.

It was a modern who said he was more afraid to live than to die! Really to face yourself, honestly to count the inner enemies that threaten to slay both body and soul and never to make one minute's peace with them—this is to bring heroism back. Moreover just insofar as this struggle lacks an applauding stadium, it is the more heroic.

A second vision of the real battle-fields that keep alert religion heroic comes when we see how much our living is driven by the crowd. One's foes may still be even in one's own household. There are few

of us who, by counting up the wrong things we do just because our crowd does them and the right things we leave undone just because they are not the way of our set, cannot discover a battle-field as exacting as any that Christians knew of old and a combat that has more to do with the fortune of our souls and the fortune of the souls of others than any struggle ever staged among the lions.

Higher Values

Matthew 10:31: Ye are of more value than many sparrows.

The sparrows are valuable, but ye more. It is a truth for the times if ever there was one. Everywhere one finds popular thought slipping into an identification of men and animals and assuming there are no truths about the former higher than about the latter.

The analogies between animal and human life are innumerable and valid. Biology, physiology, psychology are among the sciences that make this clear. But to mistake an analogy for an identity is as fatal here as anywhere else. Have we any evidence that the animals thrill to beauty as we do, or seek abstract truth, or follow ultimate ideals, or seek to

> "reach a hand thro' time to catch
> The far-off interest of tears,"

or become enthusiasts for a far-off good, or try to worship? Have we? If we have, we ought to grade

the animals up to us, not ourselves down to the animals. But have we?

Then ye are of more value than many sparrows.

Unconscious Enemies

Matthew 10:36: And a man's foes shall be they of his own household.

This sounds like autobiography. It clearly may have been. There is no sadder chapter in human annals than that which tells of Jesus' experience with his own family. At twelve the rift of misunderstanding is already visible. What pain in the words he later spoke when told his mother and brethren stood without, wanting to speak with him! What humiliation when they came to restrain him because they even questioned his sanity! We need this background to catch the full tenderness of what Jesus did for his mother while hanging on his cross. In all his deepest hopes and plans, those of his own household were his foes.

What suggestion there is here for those others who in their highest living find no support in their own homes! What warning for such as selfishly clip the wings of the dearest aspiration of their children!

Your Cross

Matthew 10:38: He that doth not take his cross and follow after me, is not worthy of me.

We have been too dazzled by this saying to read it in its plain sense. The cross meant just one thing —a shameful death, like the gallows or the electric chair today. It is not the ill-temper of a neighbor, or rheumatism in the back, or that we cannot afford an apartment with windows to the south instead of one facing north. To bear the cross is to be ready and willing to die. To take the cross and follow him is to be ready and willing to die for him.

Nor is this so remote from us as we sleepily assume because it is no longer the fashion to throw Christians to the lions as it was in Nero's day. The soldier who fights for his country and returns unscathed has given his life to his country as genuinely as he who died in a shell hole. And he was not a good soldier unless he was equally ready and willing to die. That is the point.

What would we die for? An honest answer would tell a lot about us. Are we so devoted to Christ we are ready to die for him? If so, we are worthy Christians.

The Path to God

Matthew 10:40: He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.

Men are looking for God. Here is the path of paths by which they find him. There are those who

make you aware of more than themselves. They make you aware of Christ. Arguments may have failed to do it. Even the Bible may have failed to do it. But when you meet them, it is done. They make you aware of more than themselves as the compass makes you aware of more than itself. They make Christ real and credible. Sometimes they are neither great nor learned. Their power is of a higher sort. It is they who keep the heart of the world alive and save hope from extinction.

But after you pass beyond them to Christ, your journey is not ended. He makes you aware of Another. He wants to. He is always explaining himself by this Other. He makes you feel he must be understood and that the only way he can be understood is the way he understands himself—sent by that Other, a word spoken in our silence by that Other. He says he is no orphan and makes you sure he is not. He means something. He means God!

When we seek God let us look for men and women who make us aware of Christ. That is the way to begin. It is not so much a matter of documents as of lives.

And let us yearn to be of those who suggest Christ. They are the most valuable folk alive!

Doubt or Faith

Matthew 11:3: Art thou he that cometh, or look we for another?

The church has labored over this as a sad confession of doubt, generated, perhaps, by the misfortunes that had fallen on John. May not the labor be gratuitous? May not the question equally well be the voice of a dawning faith? The answer is bound up with one's view of the Fourth Gospel. If one sees it as history as literal as Mark, the Baptist's question registers a recession of faith. If—with many reverent scholars—one regards the Fourth Gospel as a precious collection of discourses about Jesus in which the interpretive purpose is at a maximum and the historical as subservient to it as in much of the best modern preaching, then one is struck by the fact that the baptism accounts in the synoptics not only do not show the Baptist then with any clear perception of Jesus' Messiahship but actually suggesting the opposite. In that case, this sentence is born not of growing doubt, but of growing faith. And in that case the sentence is a pressing question of our own lives.

Hebrew Messianic ideas no longer dominate us, but personality is now as always the best interpretation of reality and the best revelation of God. "Man is the measure of all things." Similarly the best man, he who is fullest man, he who has pressed the possibilities of personal life to the fullest, is the best measure, is the most meaningful of all facts.

John is coming to wonder if Jesus is not that fact. The Christian believes he is. All his thinking radiates from Jesus, all his emotion is dominated by him, all his doing is in his spirit. He who asks John's question has his feet on the trail that leads to the morning.

The Great Apology

Matthew 11:5: And the poor have good tidings preached to them.

A climax. Here is the great apologetic. The foregoing, taken either physically or spiritually, is germane and important. But a regard for the unregarded, an eager counting in of the excluded, a questing pity of the unfortunate and a bearing of their burdens as one's own, a love for the unlovely and forgotten—this is the place where Jesus rests his final appeal. Those who can respond to this shall know him and not stumble. Those who share this with him—individuals or churches—are his demonstrators today.

Generosity of Mind

Matthew 11:11: Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not arisen a greater than John the Baptist.

Jesus could admire one whom he could not recognize as within his present kingdom—could even be eloquent in his enthusiasm for such a one.

What would he do today with some of the prides of the "elect," some of the anathemas spoken in his name, some of the superiorities with which Christianity patronizes the "heathen," some of the acrimonies of denominationalism?

But why did he rank John so highly? Was it John's questing spirit (11:2)? Was it that though his eyes were not yet opened he was trying to open them? Was it the genuineness of the truth already attained? Or was it just his sincerity and heroism in living up to all the vision he had?

Within the Kingdom

Matthew 11:11: He that is but little in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

To get the force of this one must remember that it follows right after exalted praise of the Baptist. The comparison is not between good and evil but between something good and something far better.

Why better? John baptized with water. That meant cleansing. Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit and with fire. That means warmth and power.

The book of Acts shows the sect of John the Baptist at Ephesus years later. Other references show it continuing into the third century. In fact it is still among us.

There are those whose religious interest is ex-

hausted with the idea of balancing old accounts. Flight from the past is their whole passion. Their mood is that of a bookkeeper. How they "stand," is the consuming question.

In others there burns a spiritual fire. It does indeed lift them above anxiety for the past. But their mood is not so much of fleeing from the past as pressing on to the future. They are on-reaching. You find them not so much struggling to get away from something as announcing, "All things are ours." They are persuaded that nothing can ever separate them "from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord," and they show that love pressing through them in eager and joyous service. The difference is great. Such are in the kingdom of heaven.

The Sociable Jesus

Matthew 11:19: The Son of Man came eating and drinking.

The geniality of Jesus affronted the sternness of the temple group and has been forgotten by Christians. Count up the times he went out to dinner or to supper that have found a place even in our brief memoirs of him. Recall the frequency and ease with which he drew illustration from scenes of social gaiety. One who spoke so naturally of feastings and weddings and dancings in the market place must often have been present and often participat-

ing. Here he makes frank reference to his social habits. Meaningless asceticism has no appeal to him. Nor long-faced, sour religion in any form. How could they to one who lived always as a guest in the Heavenly Father's house and took daily food and drink and shelter out of the hand of Deity?

Three Steps

Matthew 11:27 and *29:* All things have been delivered unto me of my Father . . . Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart.

He knows himself supremely favored. But he wants all to know the same favor. And he himself is supremely humble.

Contrast those whom to be favored makes proud and those whose blessings, even religious blessings, stir in them no impulse to share.

But did not these three facts about Jesus stand in necessary connection? The meekness and lowliness of heart were necessary for his intimacy with God. His intimacy with God made him humble. Who can know God in any other mood? Intimacy with *his* God always brings the yearning to share. Sharing his God deepens intimacy with Him. There may be yet other inevitablenesses between the seemingly contrasted elements in this picture he gives us of himself. He spoke few sentences that can lead us deeper into his inner life.

The Good Carpenter

Matthew 11:30: For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

There is still a yoke and still a burden. No doubt Jesus had made many yokes in the carpenter shop at Nazareth. No doubt he had often had farmers stop at his doors to show him the galled shoulders on their animals caused by ill-fitting yokes. Then he had reshaped them to those patient shoulders, had made them easy, had rejoiced to see the dumb beasts go plodding away with burdens that he had made light. Such memories are echoed in these words.

Life has to have yokes and burdens. But Christ brings us to peace with them. His way is the only one that really fits. Without him the littlest task may gall us. With him what Herculean burdens men have found but joy and lightness! The way of trust and love is the way of great power comfortably applied.

A Sure Argument

Matthew 12:11: What man shall there be of you, that shall have one sheep, and if this fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out?

If the subject were not so serious we should find something almost jaunty in the ease with which Jesus goes to the heart of the matter and leaves all

the reasoning of the official religionists wrecked along the way. This may have been not the least of the causes of their hating him. Precedent and authority are routed by a bit of logic quite childlike in its naiveté. "You would not treat a beast the way you are asking me to treat this man!" The lower goodness ought never to be left behind when we come to higher regions.

Yet how often we do precisely what the Pharisees wanted Jesus to do! The goodness that we applaud between man and man we would regard as a weakness if practiced by a corporation. The virtues we praise in private society are regarded as crimes in the dealings of nations (mercy in war, the building of a tariff with any regard but for ourselves, etc.). The vices for which we will ostracize in community life we treat as virtues in diplomacy (bluffing, lying, constant suspicion, etc.).

But deeper and worse, we have often believed God acts as we would condemn any mortal for acting (infant damnation, arbitrary election, joy in the agonies of any hell, shutting Peter's gate to the unbaptized, etc.). Men should treat each other at least as well as they treat animals! God will treat men at least as well as they treat each other. God's goodness cannot be less than the best human goodness—nor less than that of Jesus. Otherwise He would not be God—would Himself have to worship men and Jesus.

Not Guilty

Matthew 12:31: Blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven.

Every man long in the ministry is so painfully reminded by these words of the long line of folk he has met suffering excruciatingly from the fear they are guilty of this sin that he almost wishes the gospels had omitted this saying. Yet the answer seems simple. For one to fear that one is guilty of this sin is to prove that one is not. The sin in question is to say, "Evil, be thou my good." He who does that thereby becomes immune to the sense of sin! One suffering from a sense of sin, is not saying that, but the very opposite.

The musician aware of his faults is never hopeless. But the man who finds music painful and discord lovely, is hopeless. So long as an artist is troubled by his failures there is a chance he may lead the world. He who calls ugliness lovely and beauty evil has no chance. So he who can despise the Spirit in and by which Jesus worked is hopelessly outside the kingdom. Everyone who by that Spirit is smitten to the ground in contrition is facing toward the kingdom. Let him accept merciful forgiveness and enter.

A More Excellent Way

Matthew 12:33: Either make the tree good, and its fruit good; or make the tree corrupt, and its fruit corrupt.

There is nothing piece-meal about this. It is thorough. Jesus is not thinking of hanging grapes on the thorn bush or tying figs on thistles. Yet that grotesque method is precisely the strategy of much of our moral effort. The ideal of Jesus is the development of a character that does good spontaneously—as spontaneously as wayside plants bring forth fruit each after its own kind.

There is a slavery to goodness as real as any slavery to evil. Free goodness begins only when the tree itself has been made good by a deep and mystic intimacy with God. Then out of the abundance of the heart the mouth will speak and the hands toil. Moreover then the fruit for the first time will not wither, but abide.

One must be most patient with all the efforts men make to do good against their own natures. Certainly that is better than nothing. But Jesus knows a more excellent way. It is the only way that endures for it is the only way that gives freedom and joy. Through your personal intimacy with Jesus, let God recreate you into a good tree.

Tell-tale Idleness

Matthew 12:36: Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.

Is it worthy to see in this nothing but a suggestion of an eagerly over-exacting book-keeping attitude on the part of God? So taken, the saying does not fit at all into the spirit of Jesus or the atmosphere of the rest of his teaching. This is too petty for him.

Approach from another angle. How much our idle words reveal! You learn most about a man when his speech is relaxed and unstudied. Sometimes we seek to have our outbursts excused by saying, "I was not myself just then." But then who was I? That which was so carelessly expressed was a part of me. Men may overlook it. God cannot. We had better not.

How do we act and speak when all the restraints are off, when there is no pressure upon us, when we are "idle"? Do you know a man best when he is at work or when he is on a vacation in America or in Europe? God sees all. He is honest.

Worthless Vacuums

Matthew 12:44: Then he saith, I will return unto my house whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished.

Negative virtue never was better pictured, or its inadequacy more clearly exposed. The best business

for the ex-drunkard is heated battle with the organized power of strong drink. Nothing but real reverence will make one safe against profanity. The cure of lying is not silence but bold speaking of the truth. Active good-will is the only protection against hatred. "If thine enemy hunger, feed him." Seek the good you may speak, and slander and gossip die away. The evil imaginations will return with new power unless, with Paul, you fill your mind with whatsoever things are true and lovely and of good report. No frontal attack on selfishness has any promise. Serve, and it goes. Idolatry ends only with the worship of the one true God. Covetousness stops at the threshold only when the house is full of expensive generosity.

Unannounced Guests

Matthew 12:45: Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more evil than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man becometh worse than the first.

Keen eyes, those of Jesus! The victory of the Union cause in the sixties may be followed by the disgrace of the carpet-bag era. The triumph of the Allies in 1918 may be followed by the iniquities of the Treaty of Versailles and a "war to end war" result in greater national armaments than the world has ever seen before. So also with the strategy of

character. Not only does a single victory insure nothing but it may usher in a worse defeat.

Jesus did not name any of the other evil spirits. Can we? A man wins a victory—clears the house of his heart of some one sin. Next day into that house comes the demon of pride. Complacency stops all further moral growth. A single success ends a soul history that might have been magnificent. Or the name of the new evil spirit is "Superiority." The man turns critic and judge—even inquisitor. He has cast a beam out of his own eye but only to regard motes in other eyes as if they were beams. His very virtue therefore becomes unlovely and makes him a discouragement to all other hard-pressed fighters. Or the name of the demon may be "Self-Security." Has he not shown himself strong? Why need he be afraid any more? His guard is lowered. His door is open to innumerable new faults. God watch over us in the hour of victory!

Through the open door Jesus sees the original evil spirit entering too. The new number is not seven, but eight. So there comes also the demon of "Discouragement." That visitor always threatens disaster. Near him always stands "Cynicism" —a wonder whether any victory ever can be real; or, if so, whether it is ever worth the price. A blurring of all moral distinctions! A treason to all the aspirations that make men men!

Did Jesus leave the evil spirits unnamed because he knew experience would name them for us?

Optimism That Hath Foundations

Matthew 13:31: The kingdom of heaven is like unto a grain of mustard seed.

There is optimism for you! Jesus was an incorrigible optimist. But it was not the shallow optimism of mood, or the sort that refuses to see the facts. It was no cheap universalizing of personal good fortune—the being sure everybody ought to be happy because you are. Jesus was a realist. His words cut into the common complacency of the time like the shearing of a sword. He so read his own fortune that he discerned a cross on his horizon. He so read the signs of the times that he spoke of the ruin of his nation and its beloved temple left without one stone upon another. Out of such thinking he told with calm assurance of the mustard seed.

Why? Partly, I think, because he "knew what was in man." He read an appetite there that husks cannot long satisfy. He saw a stirring in the hearts of common folk—fishermen, tax collectors, thieves, little children—and even women of the street.

Partly this, but even more because he knew God. He saw something beyond him and beyond men that was at work in the universe like the least of seeds soon to be a lodge for the birds of the heaven, like the leaven hid in four and a half pecks of meal. Not in things as they were, not in his personal fortune or the prospects of his dear nation, but in a busy

God whose love is unconquerable, did he rest his optimism.

It is still a disappointing world and there is still no other rest strong enough to bear the weight of an unbeatable optimism.

The Enlistment of Intellect

Matthew 13:33: The kingdom of heaven is like—

There is a certain vagueness in this and in all the teaching of Jesus about the kingdom. We often regret it. We often wish we could go to Jesus and get some clear answer to the questions whether money ought to be based on gold or on Professor Fisher's dollar; whether the standard working day should be eight hours, or seven, or six, and the week six days or five; whether we should favor the open shop or the closed; whether we should go into the League of Nations or seek peace by some other means; what we should say about the tariff and immigration; and a host of other things. But we can't. Jesus never even heard of any of these matters. Nor did he deliver himself upon the social abuses of his day—the Roman occupation and the woes of slavery—although he had plenty to say about the ecclesiastical hierarchy and the desecration of the temple courts. He was no painter of Utopias, or tinkerer of political machinery, or crusading economist or socialist.

We are often sorry this is so. In fact, it is most

fortunate. Had he pictured a detailed social order he would have had to use the social material of his day. Now that material has largely passed away—as that of our day will also largely pass. Had he laid down laws or set up rigid systems, his teaching, however meaningful for his time, would have been almost meaningless for this. Nor would that have been the extent of the calamity. That would have made us servants called to routine instead of friends called to liberty. As it is, he offers a spirit and leaves each age to clothe it. He calls us to a fellowship of the mind as well as a fellowship of the heart. Each age must write its own books about the kingdom of God. He tells us what it is *like.* Then to think that kingdom out for our own times is one of the deepest intimacies with the Father that Christ has offered us.

Clearing the Paths

Matthew 13:41: All things that cause stumbling, and them that do iniquity.

The two are placed on a par. We are commonly hot against the latter and complacent about the former. We have our extradition treaties by which to require that foreign governments return to us our countrymen who have done iniquity. We are complacent about the motion picture magnates who send films to debase the youth of distant climes and beget every kind of misunderstanding, suspicion and

disgust toward America. We are capable of hounding the defaulter into the penetentiary at the very same time we are flaunting before our own children that passion for luxurious affluence that was the defaulter's stumbling block. We can leave the drunken sot in the gutter and, because we think we are able to drink with moderation, undermine the best protection against strong drink that multitudes of others ever had. Because our children have not tripped we can refuse to think on the unpleasant subject of the allurements to vice that haunt the less fortunate. God and his Son and all the angels are as much against the things that cause stumbling as they are against those that do iniquity.

Something Hidden

Matthew 13:44: The kingdom of heaven is like unto a treasure hidden in the field.

Very hidden, it often seems to us! Jesus dwelt on the idea. Did not the mustard seed have first to be hidden in the soil? Jesus says the woman hid the leaven.

The ways of political preferment are clogged with men who would laugh in your face if you told them that public office is a public trust. Yet just before election they will deck themselves out as angels of light and suffering servants of the public good. What is that in human nature that makes even Tammany feel this is the best way to capture votes?

Economic inequalities are so wide as to be an affront to all but the dullest moral sense. Yet there are tax-supported schools. Hidden deep in the structure of government is the principle that in education citizens shall serve according to their capacity and receive according to their need, till you find the rich bachelor educating the children of the poor widow. He can. Therefore he shall. They need. Therefore they receive.

International relations are still an undoubted mess. Among them we feel as far from the kingdom as we can get. Yet there is a new spirit hidden in the generation soon to have things in hand. Each year I teach a class of early High School age. I use the question method and each year ask what concrete changes would occur in the world if the kingdom fully arrived. It is many, many years since I have asked that question and not gotten an immediate first reply to the effect that war would go. Every single time that is absolutely the first reply! That means something!

There is a treasure hidden in the field.

Subtraction Equals Addition

Matthew 14:16: But Jesus said unto them, They have no need to go away; give ye them to eat.

So close do mind and matter lie together in our human bodies, so many are the illustrations there

of the power of the spirit over the flesh, that many honest modern minds feel themselves much more readily at home in the gospel accounts of the healings wrought by Jesus than they do in such narratives as the walking on the water and the feeding of the multitudes. Therefore in the latter cases they scan the accounts with care to see if they can be interpreted without resort to a material miracle. In the present case they feel themselves successful.

In Palestine nothing would be more natural than for these people to slip some food into their ample and loose-hanging pockets before starting for a distant and "desert" place. Moreover in such a crowd it would be equally natural to keep such supplies well hidden. Then how easily would one act of sharing on the part of Jesus have stirred others to like generosity till the crowd that seemed hopelessly hungry found it had more than enough.

To some this will seem like badly forced rationalizing. But, be that as it may, similar wonders have frequently happened and might more often than they do. On stiff social occasions some run about looking for some one to break the ice. Others hear a voice, "Give ye them to eat," themselves break the ice, till all the hidden social warmth of the many is brought out to save the day. In a loveless community some stop waiting for each other, take the initiative themselves, and then others bring forth unsuspected treasures of good will till the desert blossoms as the rose. In fellowships that seem spir-

itually bankrupt, some start sharing all the religious possessions they have, and there is presently amazement over the heretofore hidden Christian wealth of the group. "Give ye them to eat." Obey, and wonders come again.

The Hope of the World

Matthew 14:18: And he said, Bring them hither to me.

The little brought to him became powerful. The Christian strength of the world lies in ordinary men who bring ordinary gifts to His use. It is a fact.

Saying Grace

Matthew 14:19: He blessed, and brake . . . the loaves.

Count the times the synoptics tell of Jesus blessing the meal. Then recall the scene at Emmaus and the report that there "he was known of them in the breaking of the bread."

It seems not only to have been customary with him but that he had some characteristic way of doing it unmistakable by all who knew him—as you could identify one man anywhere by his gait, or by the way he moves his head while speaking, or his manner of shaking hands, or the way he puts on his coat.

It adds new meaning to the saying of grace at

meals. What beauty of reverence and gratitude must have moved through the Master at such times.

Leisure From the Crowd

Matthew 14:23: And after he had sent the multitude away, he went up into the mountain apart to pray.

There are so many ways in which religion turns us toward the multitude that there is danger of neglecting the necessity that it also turn us from them. Jesus sees the multitude and is moved with compassion. His heart goes out to the crowd. He walks among them to serve. But at times he sends the multitude away.

Jesus brings us a new mindfulness of one another, bids us give the hungry crowds to eat, teaches that in serving men we are serving God and following after him. But he also tells of the times we must go into the closet and shut the door.

At the heart of the religious life there is a relationship no other human can enter. God and the soul stand alone. The multitude is sent away. Its judgments no more influence us—only His. Its voices no more reach us—only His. Its ideals and plans for us are forgotten. We see only His. Its misunderstandings lose their sting. We are in His mercy and His peace.

Do we send the multitudes away frequently enough?

Eventide

Matthew 14:23: And when even was come, he was there alone.

It is the way at even. The noises quiet, the comrades retire. Our nearest withdraw into sleep. We are there alone. Whitehead has written that a man's religion is what he does with his solitude. Is it a time for idle regret, as if there were no forgiving God? Is it an opportunity for evil imaginings, as if there were not One who knoweth our thought afar off? Is it occasion for anxious worry that denies the eternal God and His everlasting arms? Or is it a mountain top from which we see life with God's correcting but kind and hopeful eyes? Does the alone take flight to the Alone and there find peace and power?

Out of the Heart of Terror

Matthew 14:27: Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.

Careful study of the gospel incidents that are commonly called miracles shows that Jesus attached no such importance to their wonder as has the Christian Church. Instead of proclaiming them, he constantly asked to have them hidden. Instead of emphasizing them, he withdrew from them more and more. He seems to have feared precisely that which has happened—that their wonder would blind men to their meaning. To Jesus they were

deeds of constructive mercy expressing the divine helpfulness—not tricks to mystify and impress. We approach them best when we seek their spiritual meaning.

The spiritual content of the paragraph of which this sentence is the heart is that out of terror came assurance, that an experience which at first sight seemed altogether forbidding was transmuted into a new intimacy with Jesus. The miraculous elements cannot be repeated and so remain outside intelligent investigation. That is why for many modern Christians they are more a perplexity than a help. But the spiritual content is repeated again and again, might be repeated much more frequently, and always in blessing.

To those with ears to hear the voice still comes. It comes out of the shadow of loss, calling men to the simplicity in which Jesus lived; out of bereavement, offering a new experience of the sufficiency of God to sustain one alone against the world; out of the night of doubt, assuring us that it may be better to walk that night clasping his hand than to stride confidently through the day. Few are the full-grown Christians who have not had times when all their sure world fell away from them, when reality became ghostly, but when out of the dark they heard the voice of One sufficient for their need and whose presence made them later look back upon that desperate experience and record that it is good to have had to pass that way.

Dodging

Matthew 15:5: But ye say . . . That wherewith thou mightest have been profited by me is given to God.

But it is not. We give to God by seeing that those who need to profit by us do so. Jesus was referring to a practice of the time by which a man might vow his estate to God and thereby escape serving even his own parents with it. This outraged Jesus and was even contrary to the Law, which said "Honor thy father and thy mother."

What does this mean for churches whose home expenses are mounting at the expense of their benevolences, or the congregations so busy keeping their own wheels turning that they absorb the energy that should go to feeding the hungry souls about them? I wonder how often Jesus would be affronted by the magnificence of our church life and turn away to needy folk the church has left unserved.

A Few with God

Matthew 15:14: They are blind guides. And if the blind guide the blind, both shall fall into a pit.

There is non-conformity for you! It was the Pharisees he was discussing. We know their status. What a charter there is here for refusing to be herded by any government, by any party, by any church, when conscience teaches they are wrong.

The better a Christian is the more often he will be found in the minority and the smaller his minority will be. None can intimidate him or invade his independence.

Gangrene

Matthew 16:11: Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

This is the second utterance of this warning in this paragraph. Jesus is excessively anxious lest the pervasive opposition of the leading classes infect his closest friends also. Some incipient discontent with him had apparently appeared among them. This laid them open to the influence of his enemies in high places.

There are always prominent folk who oppose Jesus. They may not egg on the multitude to cry for his blood. But they tend to ferment our thinking about him. His sympathy is too broad for their pride. His brotherliness would ruin their exclusiveness. His remaking of society would obliterate the advantages that come to them from having things as they are. So they would teach us not to take him too seriously. They insidiously compliment him as a good man, useful for keeping the mob in order, but of course very dreamy and not at all practical. It is not frontal attacks on Jesus but this kind of leaven that constitutes the greatest danger to Jesus today.

The need is that we see him for ourselves, ourselves sit at his feet, make up for ourselves our estimate of him and our devotion to him, and then stand against the modern Pharisees and Sadducees as he did against those of his day.

Speak for Yourself!

Matthew 16:15: But who say ye that I am?

The emphasis was on the pronoun in the second person. They had already given the opinions of others. They were high opinions too—John the Baptist, than whom none greater had been born of woman; Elijah, a figure so exalted that reverent men mingled it with the Messianic hope; one of the sublime prophets come to earth again. They did not tell him that some had called him a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber, or that others said he shared the disrepute of the publicans and outcasts. These estimates were too grotesque. The only opinions they could think of quoting were the very best.

But the quotation of even the best opinions was not enough. Jesus was not satisfied. So the disciples found his searching gaze looking into their own eyes and his voice demanding, "But who say *ye?*"

So is it yet. The opinions of others are impressive. The witness of the church is not to be lightly dismissed. But no quoted opinion—even that of

the most sonorous creeds—is enough. He turns at last to us and wants our answer. In words or life we have to give it. Moreover our own answer is more significant than anything we quote. If it is more than what we quote, as in the case of Peter, or less than what we quote, it still is more significant because it is our own.

At Last!

Matthew 16:16: Thou art the Christ.

Mark comes nearest to giving us a chronology of the life of Jesus. In Mark there is no clear assumption of the Messiahship before the visit to Caesarea Philippi. To be sure, in the second chapter Jesus is twice called "Son of Man." But in the second of these two cases, where the discussion is of the lordship of the Sabbath, we probably have to do with an editorial note where a later terminology is read back into earlier events, as we might say that "President" Hoover attended Leland Stanford University. When he attended no one called him "President." The other instance has to do with the forgiveness of sins and, in view of a silence running into the eighth chapter of a book only sixteen chapters long, must surely be considered as a temporary abandonment of chronological in favor of topical order. Besides, there is plenty of debate as to whether the term "Son of Man" carried Messianic

implications anyway. So this text apparently records the very first time that anybody ever called Jesus "Christ," or "Messiah"—that is, used of him the highest term a Jew of that day could use.

Try to reconstruct the scene:—Jesus' eagerness for correct appraisement; his refusal to seek approval through the working of wonders such as turning stones into bread or leaping unhurt from Temple pinnacle; his patience till spiritual discernment of spiritual worth should win him the great name; his question as to what others were calling him; the failure of others to see the fulness of the truth; the swift appeal to his best friends; the pause and its meaning to him and to them; the swift insight of Simon and the new, great word spoken at last; the joy of Jesus at hearing it; the prophetic remaking of Simon and the others that was involved in the speaking of it.

But why talk of Caesarea Philippi and the long ago? Every single element of that distant and ancient scene reappears as Jesus and we face each other:—his patient waiting and refusal to cheapen his appeal; the inadequacy of quoting the responses of others; the insistence that I answer for myself; the divine joy when one puts Jesus first, and the prophetic remaking of the humblest man that does so.

Building Material

Matthew 16:18: And upon this rock I will build my church.

It is a pity that thought about this sentence is so sharply confined to debates of the extravagant sectarian claims that one company of Christians bases upon it. We are thereby robbed of an appreciation of something simpler and much more profound.

The word "church" occurs most rarely in the teachings of Jesus—only in the eighteenth chapter where the handling of differences is being discussed, and here—and in these cases his word probably means the "congregation," or the "gathering," or the "fellowship", of his people, without his having in mind any such organization as we commonly associate with the word "church." It really was just his Kingdom of which he was thinking.

But why does he use the word here? Something tremendous had just taken place. Through spiritual insight, Simon had just called him "Christ." This was the first time anyone had done that (See 16:16). Simon was not in a particularly theological frame of mind. Perceptions like his are more the raw material of theology than theology itself. At best he was using the word with but feeble appreciation of the meaning Jesus wanted it to carry, as the very next paragraph clearly shows. But *it was the greatest word Simon knew.* He was putting Jesus Christ first. He was making Jesus the one above all others

to be obeyed, followed, honored, believed. It was when a man did that that the word "church" appeared. When a man did just that, then it was time to build. "And upon this rock I will build my church."

That which made Simon into one of the foundation rocks makes others into rocks for the higher rearing of the walls. It is not correct theology that does this, or even errorless and complete understanding, however useful it is to press constantly nearer to these goals. It is not esoteric connection with the historical Jesus. Judas had that. It is not any of the princeliness and worldly power that Jesus put aside at his temptation—though so many wearing his name still seek these first of all. It is not even a perfect personal record. It is just one thing, in prelate and serf alike. It is our putting of him first of all and at the center of all. It is the recognition of him in the language of our time as Simon used the language of his time as the one we will obey, follow, honor and believe above all others and against all others. It is this that makes us rocks for the building of the church, of the Kingdom.

Free Necessity

Matthew 16:21: Began Jesus to show unto his disciples, that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things.

Strange word in connection with Jesus! Was there ever one more free of authority, more disdain-

ful of compulsion? How many tried to compel him and could not! His family tried it when they thought him insane. They did not succeed. Simon tried it just after Jesus had paid him a great compliment. The only result was to hear Jesus call him Satan. Friends tried it as the Master started for Jerusalem—and then followed him there in their fears. The Jerusalem authorities tried it. He regarded them not at all. Pilate, incarnating all the might of the Roman Empire, attempted to turn Jesus aside. He failed. State, church, friends, family, all tried it in vain. He would have no *must*.

Yet the word none could stick upon him he used often of himself. He *must* go and suffer. Every fork on the road to Jerusalem offered him an escape for which no man would ever have blamed him. Up to the hour of the arrest and even beyond, he was free to turn back. He who would brook no outward compulsion carried an imperious *must* within. It was like the compulsion of the volunteer patriot who must offer all for his country, of the social worker who must turn the back on every long-known comfort and dwell in the reeking slum, of the parent who must suffer for the children, of Paul whose greatest woe would have been not to preach the gospel and ransack a hostile empire to see if he might win some to the way of Jesus. It was like these, yet more. It was born of his superlative divine intimacy. It was the compulsion of the burden-bearing God struggling for utterance. "Began

Jesus to show unto his disciples that he *must* go unto Jerusalem and suffer many things."

We are greatest when we are most free without and most bound within, when an inner *must* of heavenly origin defies and overrides the *must's* of every other kind. The compassions of God are still struggling for utterance. We are most Christian when they most claim us, at once making us most free and most bound.

Exploiting Jesus

Matthew 16:22: And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord.

Peter had just been the first of men to call Jesus the Messiah (16:16). But he knew just the kind of Messiah he wanted and was still far from any willingness to accept Jesus' own interpretation of what it was to be the Christ. He wanted to treat Jesus subjectively and force him into the mould of his own tastes.

That was too bad. Jesus said it was a Satanic role for Peter to play. We wince at the Master's reply—and then jump into the same role.

A secular journal, in reviewing a recent popular life of Jesus, observed that the author had remade Christ in his own image. But we all do just that—much of the time!

How we squirm to get rid of the plain objectivity of what Jesus said about mammon, about the camel

and the needle's eye. We say, "Be it far from thee, Lord," and labor to remake him to fit into our acquisitive society. The emphasis on service in modern business is surely a step toward the light. But when we identify service for gain with the disinterested, unrequited service he taught and thereby try to baptise business into his name, we are remaking him in an image not his own. Paternalism in industry is better than brutality but to mistake it for the full-orbed brotherhood of Jesus is to caricature him to our tastes.

Strangest of all, the churches remake him into an instrument of imperialism, an ecclesiastical convenience!

He and we remain strangers till we treat him objectively and for the cry, "Far be it from thee, Lord," learn to substitute another—"Far be it from us."

Editing Jesus

Matthew 16:22: Be it far from thee, Lord.

Is there any place where Peter comes closer to us? We all often want Jesus without the cross. We shamble by Good Friday in the most awkward possible way. We want Jesus to instruct us, comfort us, inspire us, feed our optimism and make us feel serenely safe. But when he faces ultimate tragedy, ultimate injustice, ultimate agony, and says he has business to do with them, we say, "Please

don't." So we would miss his superlative deed,—the transmuting of all these into blessing. We want him to bring us flowers. We are alarmed when he insists on grasping the nettles.

Because, perhaps, we want our lives that way. Jesus is to adorn us, to shelter us, to save us by sparing us the drinking of the cup, to enrich us by gifts won through his labor and costing us nothing. When we see him hurl himself with a shout against the worst, we wince and ask him not to, rightly suspecting that if he insists on doing it he may ask us to be crucified with him.

Peter is understandable—too understandable. But he lived to learn what it is to be marred in the Master's service, for his sake to stand shelterless, to drink the cup with him, to know the cost of his way—and find all this loss mysteriously made gain in a new kind of life beside which all other living can be spoken of only as death.

Grasping the Nettle

Matthew 16:24: And take up his cross.

Patiently to endure the inevitable; so to lift unescapable suffering into the sunlight of the divine fellowship that we shall escape all bitterness and repining; to undergo pain in such a manner that it may furnish precious education and greatening of soul—all this is part of the Christian ideal and toward

the doing of this none can lead us better than Jesus. Nevertheless Jesus is here discussing something even deeper and larger still.

We are to "take up" our crosses. Instead of being inevitable, their bearing waits for our initiative. Instead of trying merely to carry them well after we have tried to escape them and failed, we are to go out to meet them, to find them, voluntarily to snatch them up and walk away with them. The note here is not that of a noble endurance but that of a sublime attack. The aggression is with us.

So did Paul take up the cross of the ancient world, Riis the cross of "the other half" in New York and Jane Addams in Chicago, Grenfell the cross of neglected Labrador. Calvary was not forced on Jesus. It was his act. How often his friends showed him the way of escape and urged it on him. There was no crossroad on all the journey from Capernaum to Jerusalem that did not offer an escape for which no man would ever blame him. But his whole errand on this world was a love that takes up more than it is forced to bear.

The Divine Paradox

Matthew 16:25: For whosoever would save his life shall lose it: and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall find it.

Scholars call this the best attested of all the sayings of Jesus. If frequency of occurrence in the

Gospels is the criterion, they are right. This is the only one to appear six times. It is in all four records and twice in both Luke and Matthew. Evidently the evangelists kept coming back to it as the heart of the matter.

Throw yourself into my cause—this is the summit of the appeal of Jesus. As from the summit all else becomes clear, so from this height you will see the path as you need it, the truth as you require it, the life as you thirst for it. The loss of self in the cause of Jesus—that is the message of the church before all theologies and all ecclesiasticisms. Not in intellectual intricacies and not in any quest for status, but in this the Christian begins and continues—and all the rest he needs shall be added unto him.

Transfigured—Who?

Matthew 17:2: He was transfigured before them.

The sequence is important. At Caesarea Philippi the disciples had just discovered that Jesus is the Messiah.

Immediately Jesus began to show them his interpretation of the Messiahship, so utterly different from everything to which the Temptation had tempted him (16:21). This precipitated a struggle. Could his friends understand and accept his mind about his mission? Simon Peter failed at once

(16:22). All failed again and again till after the resurrection. But in the transfiguration scene they had a momentary success prophetic of their final victory.

Here is something better than physics and chemistry, better than any material miracle. It is a necessary step in the development of Christianity. Men who believed that Jesus was the Messiah, but who were far from accepting his interpretation of the Messiahship, went with him up a mountain. There he was transfigured before them. There they saw him glorious. There they perceived a Christ about to die as being surpassingly great. There they saw such a Christ no longer as an isolated puzzle. They saw him in the company of Elijah and Moses. They saw him in the sweep of history. They saw him fulfilling both prophecy and law. Yes, and as we read of the heavens opened at the baptism, of the ministering angels in the temptation, of a revelation from the Father above at Caesarea Philippi, so here also we learn of divine help. The "cloud", which is but a Hebrew way of naming God, overshadows the mountain. They have there a special realization of the presence of God. Out of this cloud—out of this Presence—they are taught to think of Jesus as greater even than Moses and Elijah. "This is my beloved *Son.*" A serving, suffering, sacrificing Christ—not now a princely, spectacular, domineering Christ—is now seen as glorious, as standing nearer to God than any one in the past experience

of the race. To be sure, the disciples did not hold steadily to this vision. But they had seen it, and that meant quite enough to give point to the remark that the transfiguration on the mount was not so much the transfiguration of Jesus as it was the transfiguration of his disciples. In how great need do both Christians and Churches still stand of being thus transfigured!

Enough

Matthew 17:8: And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one, save Jesus only.

Peter, James and John did not like it that way. Their choice would have been to remain on the mount of the transfiguration. Instead they were about to descend the mountain and find a demoniac surrounded by a rabble waiting at its base.

What descents we have known! From the exhilaration of the war to cynical disillusionment. From the assumption that moral progress is as inevitable as the evolution of the stars to crime waves that shake the foundations of all government. From a time of apparently finished theologies to a time of religious "if's" and "maybe's." From the ecstatic we have been returned to the commonplace.

But one thing stands unshaken. It stands out the more commanding just because so much else is shaken. No historian of the higher concerns of life

will better describe our times than by saying, "Lifting up their eyes, they saw no one, save Jesus only." That the actual historic Jesus is more vividly present to our minds than he has ever been since the second century is the most potent part of present history.

Though we see only him we thereby keep our faith in human nature, know the spirit in which to remodel society, have the corner stone for the reshaping of all thought.

That vision makes the commonplace uncommon, glorious.

Alas!

Matthew 18:7: Woe to that man through whom the occasion cometh!

The mood is more of pity than of threat. Where our Bible translates Jesus as saying "Woe to," some suggest we should translate, "Alas for." That seems more true to the mind of Jesus.

Alas for the hosts and hostesses, who have themselves perhaps learned self-restraint, but who put liquor before youth! Alas for the alumni who arrange college athletics for the debauching of the fine spirit of youth! Alas for the purveyors of entertainments who grow opulent by making violence appear heroic and vice natural and beautiful!

Alas for them, for the blood of the innocent whom they entrap is on their own heads.

The Ogre of Size

Matthew 18:10: See that ye despise not one of these little ones.

The ogre of size is scaring men out of their senses. Astronomy has made them feel themselves too tiny to have any importance. Nothing is more common than wistful talk about our being infinitesimal specks on a tiny island lost in illimitable space.

But is not all size relative? Has not the work of the microscope kept pace with that of the telescope? Have not the investigations of the sub-atomic world as much right to influence us as the plumbings of space? I have read of entities within the atom so small that when they move in their orbits they are as far apart in relation to their size as are the stars in the sky. There is minuteness for you! If size counts, this discovery ought to exalt us as much as astronomy has depressed us.

But does size count? Has it any right to influence religious thinking? You don't buy carbon that way. It may take the form of coal or the form of diamonds. You reverence a very small diamond more than a great deal of coal. We do not measure persons by their size. New-born babes average about seven and a quarter pounds. Grown persons weigh more—some, much more. You never saw a new-born babe you did not reverence. You have seen many grown folk you would be ashamed to

reverence so much as any new-born child. It is high time mere bigness stopped scaring us so.

The Joy of Battle

Matthew 18:13: He rejoiceth over it more than over the ninety and nine which have not gone astray.

If one of your children has been ill unto death, and now at last the fever has dropped and the coma ended and you are beginning to see a clear path back to happy health, don't you rejoice over that child more than over all the others who have never tasted illness? Of course you do. You also expect all the other members of your family to join you. Jesus says God is just like that.

Where is the pride of the church? Is it in the members who have always lived conventional lives, or in the man who has gone down in fierce temptation but now is staggering back toward righteousness? By what is your greatest interest aroused? By the pallid goodness of the man or woman who has never struggled with desire, or by the homesickness after righteousness that flickers in the heart of one who has just finished a merited prison sentence and now is facing a hostile world? Our God is a God of battles. He is out there on the frontier where the fight is hottest. Can we share his rejoicing?

The Root of the Matter

Matthew 18:14: It is not the will of your Father who is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.

There may be no briefer or better way to describe Jesus as a teacher and a worker than to say he was marked by a profound reverence for personality. His times were ridden by race hatred. Gentiles were "dogs." He never touched racial boundaries that he did not cross them and the bridge of his crossing was reverence for personality. He was similarly distinguished in his treatment of womanhood and for the same reason. He so much reverenced the little children that when his friends tried to protect him from parents who wanted him to touch their babes he rebuked them and even took the little ones in his arms.

It is a good way to test how far customs and institutions conform to the mind of Christ. Industry, war, the church, the state—do they give personality the first consideration? Do we—wherever we meet it and across every barrier?

The Great Gain

Matthew 18:15: If thy brother sin against thee, go, show him his fault between thee and him alone: if he hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.

Few so brief verses say so much. When one has sinned against you, do not revenge, but do not just

nurse your injury either. Of course you cannot forgive unrepented sin, but you can take the initiative in trying to bring repentance to pass. Least of all make a stir, run around telling the world how shabbily you have been treated and exposing your wounds for all to admire. "Show him his fault between thee and him alone."

Why? To gain thy brother. That is the heart of forgiveness. It is the restoration of fellowship. Other results of the sin may have to live on. But through a frank facing of the sin and an honest dealing with it by penitence on the one side and forgiveness on the other, you may gain your brother. That is the main point.

Plural Prayer

Matthew 18:19: If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father who is in heaven.

He who tells us we shall not be heard for our much speaking and makes light of repetition cannot here mean that multitudinous speaking has efficacy by the mere weight of numbers. How unworthy the frequent assumption of well-meaning folk that if we get a sufficiently heavy majority against God He will yield to the popular will and do what He does not really want to do! This is one element in the blasphemy of "prayer chains."

Can we get a better understanding of this saying by remembering that God is always wanting agreement, cooperation, fellowship, among his children and that therefore the agreed prayer, the unselfish prayer, already lies within the will of God? It is the good of the many He is after—not my good at the expense of the good of any other one. The Lord's Prayer itself is addressed not to "My Father," but to "Our Father." The petition of egoism must affront Him. It does not get above our own heads. But a plural prayer that grows out of mutual love is an echo of His own desire.

God-likeness

Matthew 18:22: Until seventy times seven.

What *eagerness* to forgive! Ungrudging and unlimited! No miserable self-righteousness in discovering how often your brother can sin. No cataloguing of his faults and inwardly rejoicing they are so many while outwardly pretending to be hurt by them. But a pain so genuine over the cleft his sin puts between you and him that you seek and grasp every single opportunity to heal that cleft. And that is god-likeness!

Seeds of Patience

Matthew 18:32–33: Thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou besoughtedst me: shouldest not thou also have had mercy on thy fellow servant, even as I had mercy on thee?

There is a strain of high indignation running through this parable. It is hard to make an accurate translation of the sums involved. But they are about $10,000,000 and $17. The ratio is about 588,235 to one. That expresses the difference between the mercy this servant had received and the mercy he was willing to bestow.

The discrepancy was so great that the other servants were outraged and went and told on the wicked servant. No doubt they were sure they would never do anything like that. But Jesus cannot have been so sure the case was unique or he would have seen no use in telling the story.

Never mind about paralleling the story in dollars and cents. It may find its duplicate now and then in finance. But it is of the realm of moral qualities that Jesus is thinking.

How often we are most unmerciful in condemning faults we ourselves possess. Perhaps it is because such faults in others hold up a mirror to ourselves in which we dare not look. There is some condemning reminder about them. The conceited man may be the most intolerant of conceit in others and the miserly man most loud in demanding charity from his neighbors. So true is this that if any

fault in others is particularly irritating to us we shall do well to search our own lives with candles to see if it is not hiding there.

But nothing will do more to make us merciful than to study the teachings of Jesus with our hearts bowed. His shift of emphasis from objective deed to inner motive and desire makes it clear that the best of us is resting so heavily on the mercy of God that none of us can be stern with any other. The patience the world has shown us and, most of all, the patience that God shows us in spite of His perfect knowledge of our evil hearts, must make us patient with others whose real lives we know but superficially.

Diagnosis

Matthew 19:21: If thou wouldest be perfect, go, sell that which thou hast, and give to the poor.

The good physician puts his finger on the particular malady from which this man is suffering. The man wants to be saved. He is concerned about himself. He has been decent for a price. Jesus calls for a right-about-face. Save others. Be concerned for them. Practice costly righteousness. Then Jesus will take him into the inner circle.

Opposite tempers of life never met more sharply. They are always meeting.

The Poor Rich

Matthew 19:23: It is hard for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven.

This is no arbitrary truth, but one that lies in the nature of the case. The kingdom is marked by fellowship, by free, easy, glad sharing of heart and life itself.

Wealth tends to absorption in things more than in persons. It supplies a dangerous material power over persons. It materializes our human relationships and tempts to the bestowal of goods as a substitute for self-giving. By making self-gratification possible it absorbs us with it.

In ways most subtle, wealth closes natural paths toward fellowship. By removing us from the common lot it robs us of understanding. Without understanding, where is friendship? Nor do those in the common lot understand the rich. Wealth lessens both our sense of needing others and the sense of others that we need them, and thereby shoves us outside of many of the interdependencies that make up the kingdom. We are checked in those experiences of gratitude that purify and ennoble. When the rich try to break across the barriers their wealth has reared they are baffled by an artificiality in the attitude of others and are haunted by the fear that any friendliness offered them is not for their own sakes but for some hidden, selfish end.

How hard! Still it is possible with God and one

wonders whether he ever works a greater wonder than a rich man in the kingdom of heaven.

Are we wise in our ambitions after wealth? Have we duties not yet recognized toward those experiencing the difficulties Jesus laments? Can we give pure and disinterested friendship in a way to help the rich enter the kingdom? That would be a rare service indeed.

Expectancy

Matthew 19:26: With God all things are possible.

Expectancy is everywhere the mood of science. In this realm we are always on tip-toe to get an early sight of the new things that we are always sure are just about to appear. But this mood may keep close company with another that has no expectancy at all for any bettering of human nature. Still it was in connection with the latter that Jesus spoke these words. He had just been face to face with greed and speaking of its power over men in a way to frighten his hearers. But he still kept his attitude of expectancy because "with God all things are possible."

How much of his power lay right here. Whoever thought a group of Galilean fishermen could remake the world? Jesus did. Who ever dreamed Zaccheus could turn honest once again? Jesus did. Whoever thought Saul of Tarsus could be made into Paul of the Roman Empire? God did.

Meeting with one man stirs all your lower nature. You question whether anything good is possible. A second man takes you at precisely your face value. You feel your present nature set into concrete. But the meeting with a third makes fresh nobilities stir in you. New virtues press for birth. His standards are high but because he holds that all things are possible with God he is expectant and his expectancy lays hold of you with a divine power.

We need this kind of blessing. So do all others.

Vistas

Matthew 19:27: What then shall we have?

At times the disciples asked this question out of sordid selfishness. They wanted to know if religion was a good bargain. Men are still asking the question just that way.

But the question may voice another and a worthy mood. Instead of expressing a hesitation that waits for a bettering market before deciding, it may inquire what is to be expected from a choice already made. Then Jesus does not despise it.

What advantages are there in the religious life? At least these.

Men have often to retire from the throng into the circle of their friends, from their friends into their families, even from their families into themselves. Tragic is it if when they come there to the core of

life they find a void. Jesus did not. The Christian does not. Instead he finds a fellowship none can take away, more intimate, understanding, recreative than all else.

Suffering is certain. As religion heightens sensitivity it may even increase one's pain. But it works to decrease all that great body of hurt that comes from unrighteous living. And where it cannot lift the burden it does something far better. It makes one strong to carry it erect.

A driving purpose is a prime necessity. Without it life sickens and gangrenes. Religion brings the largest and sublimest urge there is. When other purposes begin to draw the line, religion marches right on into a completeness and universality outmatching everything else.

These things, at least, the Christian is to have. They belong to eternal life.

Joy Refused

Matthew 20:11: They murmured against the householder.

Not because he had failed in the just meeting of his full contract with them but because he had done more than that for others. The whole story soars above the region of rewards and punishments into the region of grace. Had those men kept pace with that movement they would have rejoiced in the generous treatment of the late comers who perhaps

stood in as great need as they. The story may have been taken right out of the life of Nazareth or Capernaum or Jerusalem. It could in substance be taken from any of our communities. Does the gracious treatment of others always bring us joy? Or (v. 15) are our eyes evil because others are good? And where would any of us stand if God did not deal with us beyond our merit?

The Curse of Parents

Matthew 20:20: Then came to him the mother of the sons of Zebedee with her sons, worshipping him, and asking a certain thing of him.

Not the last time a parent has warped the ambitions of the children!

Little children are all born without the poison of race prejudice. Missionary children prove that abroad and the lower the grade in school at home the more democratic it is. It is the influence of the elders that begins the toxic process.

Little children are born with a scorn of luxury and of social stiffness. Thereby they horrify their parents and their parents proceed to cure—that is, spoil—them.

Often the children have little or no thirst for place and position. But family pressure turns them that way.

Parental influence may be the most purifying and elevating. How often is it the opposite!

Giving What We Don't Own

Matthew 20:23: To sit on my right hand, and on my left hand, is not mine to give; but it is for them for whom it hath been prepared of my Father.

If it is not for him to give, how can it be for us? Our ecclesiastical dignities have no spiritual validity that we bestow—even when the election is unanimous. The only item that really counts is intimacy with the Father. No ecclesiastical procedure can insure that and, quite as often as not, such procedure does not even recognize it. There may be greater spiritual dignity in the bishop's chauffeur than in the bishop, and in the minister's postman than in the minister. Spiritual greatness none can *give,* but we could all recognize it oftener.

The Contrast

Matthew 20:26: Not so shall it be among you.

Lordship and authority—these are not the mark of the Christian, nor is regard for them the mark of a Christian society. What would this sentence —taken in earnest—do to our homes, our societies, our national life, our churches! If Jesus were here to commend, how often would he pass by those most used to commendation in favor of those least used to it,—perhaps from the railway president to some engineer doing his trick at those terrible wheels,

perhaps from the coal baron to a miner working far from the sun, perhaps from the labor leader to the personnel director trying to substitute understanding for strife, perhaps from the denominational campaigner to the lonely village parson seeking to turn country youth into friends of the Carpenter.

Ambition

Matthew 20:27: Whosoever would be first among you shall be your servant.

It is a mistake to think that Jesus tries to stamp out of men their natural ambitions. Rather was his method what a school of psychologists calls "sublimation." He fully recognized the human longing for greatness and priority. He sought not to eradicate that hunger but to direct it to the only food altogether wholesome and satisfying. His complaint was not that men are too ambitious but that they are too easily contented and contented with the wrong things—the unenduring things.

Be great. Seek to be first. Bring your ambition right into the kingdom. You need it. The world needs it. God needs it. But there is only one genuine greatness that is possible for a human. It is the greatness of Jesus himself. It is the greatness of God. It is ministering. There is only one priority that will stand up at last—or that really stands up

in human history, for that matter. It is being first in service.

We have already learned this in the admirations we bestow as we look back on the human story. We need to learn it as we look about us and forward to our own lives. Aspire, but remember there is only one aspiration that God and His universe can bless at last, only one genuine success. But that is a success open to the least of us.

Vivid Religion

Matthew 21:2: Go into the village that is over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me.

How vivid religion must have been to those who went on this errand! Many a reader has been jealous of these messengers, has thought how gloriously compelling and exciting the Christian life would be if only Jesus would give him equally definite instructions—"Go there, find that, bring it, say so and so." We are sure that if we had been with him as he drew near to Jerusalem and he had spoken to us as he did to those two disciples, the experience would have thrilled us through and through.

But it is certain that our religion might be more like the experience of those two disciples, and very easily, too. The uninteresting vagueness is mostly our own fault. Make it definite and it becomes exciting.

Instead of praying, "Forgive my sins and finally save me," pray, "Forgive me for that sharp word I spoke as I rushed out of the house this morning to catch the 8.14 train; save me now from the mean pride I feel because I have been taken into the club ahead of the neighbor who has lived here two years longer than I."

Instead of saying, "I am going to be good today," say, "Today I really am going to write that letter, and pay my doctor, and make that call I have so long been the coward to postpone."

Instead of indulging in an orgy of pity for the brother of Christ around the corner who has just lost his job, go into the town over against you and look for something else to carry him and his family and bring him the new chance.

Make the Christian life definite and it will be vivid.

If We'd Been There

Matthew 21:5: Meek, and riding upon an ass.

We call it the Triumphal Entry. Why? He was riding a borrowed animal, and a humble one at that. He was surrounded by an unorganized throng of poor people mostly from the country villages. No band, no uniforms, no flags, no officials, no ticker tape, no welcoming committee and no cowering vanquished. Had you or I chanced upon the scene

we should most likely have pitied the simplicity of these people and hurried to get out of the dust. Least of all could we suspect the world would later call this the Triumphal Entry. We'd go to Rome for something to call that.

And we'd be wrong. For this one brought an interior equipment mightier than Rome's outward strength. He was sure of God. He was sure of God's plan for the life of this world and that he had a sure part in that plan. He was serenely ready to be murdered to make God known and release His power over and in the hearts of men. Would that Jerusalem had known! Do we?

The Power of Wrath

Matthew 21:12: Cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the money-changers.

How unintelligently have men overworked the cleansing of the temple to justify the reign of force and violence! As if by physical force and violence one provincial could travel up to Jerusalem and, single-handed, ruin, even for a day, the rich traffic of the capitol's grandees! Anyway, the whip is mentioned only in John and there is clearly meant only for the driving of the sheep and oxen. You have not seen an inch beneath the words until you understand that he wrought that day by the higher

power of a conscience outraged by the sight of the strong exploiting the weak, using men they ought to serve, gone to church in order to get a chance to short-change some strangers. No apparent sanctity could ever shield such guilt from his generous wrath. Whip and arm could not clear the temple. But one visitor, righteously indignant, could. Violence wakes replying violence. Righteous indignation shames and disarms.

The Shelter of Indignation

Matthew 21:15: They were moved with indignation.

Of course. Jesus had attacked their "special privilege." He had attacked it at its citadel. The exorbitant traders and "short-change artists" were there by official allowance and it was even reported that the temple dignitaries profited by the arrangement. What were times coming to when they could be called to account by a wanderer from Nazareth and even the children in the temple sang his praises? It was asking too much of them that they face the issue he raised on its own merits. In such cases it is always easier just to be indignant and quote custom and authority and plot against the prophet. (Think of the sheer courage Jesus showed here.) That makes it hard for the prophet. But how often, in the end, indignation has found another resting place—and how often it will.

Commuting

Matthew 21:17: Went forth out of the city of Bethany.

Where there was the nearest thing to a home that Jesus had. During his last and hardest and greatest days, Jesus was a commuter.

What did Jesus bring from Jerusalem to Bethany in the evening? What take back in the morning?

Serenity

Matthew 21:21: If ye have faith . . . . even if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou taken up and cast into the sea, it shall be done.

What mountain? Was it the one looming across his path? He was daily brushing the sleeve of death. The cross that had long been getting more and more distinct was now very near indeed. He had known that every step on the southern journey to Jerusalem was a step nearer to it. He had just done what he knew must rile the temple priests and all their friends to a positive frenzy against him. He saw that he, the Lord of life, was to die. Was this the mountain?

In any case, the statement is a dazzling vision of his inner life. Those of faith, those walking close with God and uttering his energetic righteousness, can feel the very landscape to move with them. Somehow, they are secure in God.

Time to Jump

Matthew 21:31: Verily I say unto you, that the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.

It is interesting that Matthew here speaks of the kingdom of God. The author shares the well-known Hebrew hesitation about using the name of the deity, just as we often say, "Providence," when we mean God. Therefore, although no other evangelist use the term at all, and although Matthew talks about the kingdom far more than anybody else, he is most careful, no doubt partly because of his own personal feelings and partly because his gospel is addressed especially to the Jews, to change the phrase, "kingdom of God," into, "kingdom of heaven."

But there are four times when he slips up. Those four times are all alike in one particular. Each one is an extremely startling statement from the lips of Jesus. See your Concordance. Now and then in wording a particularly arresting saying he was so engrossed in the thought that he forgot to revise the language.

Well might he do that here. All the emphasis is on the publicans and the harlots. To have Jesus sit in the very temple and look the chief priest and the elders of the people in the eye and say the publicans and the harlots are accepted ahead of them was enough to make anybody jump and forget all about his studied literary style. The publicans were

paid agents of the foreign power. The law said harlots were fit only to be publicly stoned. In this saying Jesus cut right across every racial and social distinction exactly at the point where national pride and established morality made those distinctions most passionate.

No family descent from Abraham or from the Mayflower passengers, no Nordic or any other sort of blood, no color of skin or kind of hair or slant of eyes, no occupation, no position in "society" or even in the church, have anything to do with membership in the kingdom. Their value is precisely zero against one bit of honest penitence or genuine moral hunger or one ounce of moral effort.

The hearers in the temple must have jumped with an astonishment that spread to Matthew and from which he never recovered. There is something the matter with us if we do not jump too.

The Dangerous Jesus

Matthew 21:38: Come, let us kill him, and take his inheritance.

There were those in Jerusalem so pleased with the *status quo* that they really preferred the Messiah should not come. Others have found it disturbing to have him come too near. He is very useful if only he will keep a certain distance. But somehow he refuses to do that.

It is convenient to have chaplains in the army and the navy. They can help "pep" the boys up, comfort many in their troubles and do a big service to morale. But suppose one quote Jesus too intimately—for instance, "It was said to them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; but I say unto you, that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment." Better no Jesus than one who makes his servants talk that way.

It is good to have Jesus build churches to keep the masses contented. The hope of golden streets may make them less impatient with the alleys in which they are living now. The teaching of Jesus can help make them honest and industrious. That saves a lot of trouble and helps profits amazingly. But the situation gets terrible if Jesus comes close enough for all to hear him say, "You don't own anything outright. God has the right of eminent domain over all your possessions and all your powers. The most you can be is a steward for him in the service of the common good." That is terrifying. Better no religion than one that brings him so close.

If only Jesus would stay in Galilee and cheer a few country folk it would be quite all right. But he won't. As one sent, he comes right into Jerusalem, even into the temple, looks about on everything and measures it and even says that one stone shall not be left upon another. That is too much. So

men still kill him and take his inheritance—for a time.

Buying Clothes

Matthew 22:12: And he was speechless.

After all, perhaps that was the best thing for him to be. When you find yourself at a full dress party in your street clothes, talk will not do much to improve matters. Some caught in such a fix have reported it was "hell."

Could a man whose education never went beyond simple arithmetic be comfortable confined in a meeting of the Mathematical Club? Can a man to whom all sounds are just noise enjoy being shut up in a music hall? Will one who has learned nothing of how to live in spontaneous and unmercenary goodwill be at all at home in the heaven he talks of expecting? Might not a society of Christlike spirits be hell for him?

The judgments of God are not arbitrary. They accord with the garments we are so busily selecting.

And God

Matthew 22:21: Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's.

It was dangerous to question Jesus. One was likely to get more than one asked. Here was a prob-

lem of taxation—as musty as most such problems are. Jesus was a patriot and cannot have liked Rome. But he was after something much more than political revolution. That had been settled at the Temptation. So his reply advised political patience. But he did not stop there. The something that he wanted more than revolution was a penitent and devoted people. This was more than the suave questioners had bargained for.

In our time the church and its Lord are frequently asked questions to which they do not make even so clear an answer as Jesus made about the tax. But the second part of his reply does keep coming back, "Render unto God the things that are God's." The world thinks the reply irrelevant and turns away. That is a mistake. It is the profoundest possible reply. It is precisely because we are not a penitent and consecrated people that our corporate life is so perplexed. Following the advice of Jesus would not so much answer our puzzlement as lift us out of it. Then neither capital nor labor would win in the fight, nor would any nation be victor in the race for armaments and power. The fight would stop. The race would be called off.

The effort toilsomely to increase the number of penitent and consecrated folk in the world seems a task far from the hot problems of the market place and the crises of international relations. In fact it is the only thorough way of dealing with those problems and crises—even tariffs and taxation.

Therefore

Matthew 22:32: I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.

How trivial and immature do these lofty words make many of our "proofs" and doubts of immortality appear. Swiftly they sweep the whole matter up to God. It lives no more only on the level of our wishes and our fears. We are allowed no more to seek assurance only by looking within. One still is patient with Sir Oliver Lodge and all his ilk. So precious is the resurrection faith that nothing that can lead honest men to it is to be derided even by one who with equal honesty finds he cannot walk upon their path. But Jesus centers the whole matter elsewhere.

It does not center in men. It centers in God. It is not so much a matter of our wishes, but of His. It is not first of all a question of our nature but of the divine character. Can it content God to summon His children out of the void only to let them vanish in the void again? Can God, as Jesus makes him credible to us, be a God of the dead? Our vital faith in immortality will vary in precise ratio with our vital acquaintance with the God of Jesus. Examine any group and you will find it so. This assurance is not something added on to real religion—a beautiful over-plus of faith. It lives at the heart of religion and prospers as that heart is healthy.

The Master Passion

Matthew 22:37: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart.

Mind and heart keep company. Intelligence and passion act and interact. One's real mind and one's real heart fit like the body and the skin. The parts of your mind and heart that do not fit each other are not really yours. A major note in the modern study of man is that we are more controlled by feeling and imagination and less by theoretical opinions and cold intelligence than some used to think. Intelligence and passion cannot live in discord. One will finally master the other. But tell me where a man's intelligent passion centers and you have told me the man, what he is, what he will become, what he will do, how he will influence the world, what he will contribute of good or of evil. What is your master passion—drink, money, fashion, service? That is the key to you. That is the sure prophecy of how you will live this week and what you'll do to the world.

The master passion? There is one more potent and more beautiful than any other. It gives you the definition of the right and saves you from failure and disillusionment and the waste of life. It makes you undiscourageable as Christ was and unafraid as Paul was. It rids your charity of the hidden poison of selfishness. It liberates you from the practical polytheism that, though all the idols be

broken, still curses and divides our living. It lifts you above weariness. It lifts you above cynicism. It lifts you above both the praise and the blame of men, and I know not which is the more important. It is the only thing that will keep you at real service till you drop. It is the only cure for moral disappointment. It gives driving force to life. It will make you strong to face a lie in any armor and not to yield. It will show you diamonds sparkling in the mud of the blackest and dirtiest life you know. That master passion is the passion for God as Jesus Christ has shown Him to us.

The Loving Mind

Matthew 22:37: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God . . . . with all thy mind.

This is not a common expression. Have you ever heard it outside this text? Did man ever say to his lady-love, "I love you with all my mind"? Would his lady-love be pleased if he did? Yet if he fail to love her with his mind he may soon cease to love her with anything else and the failure so to love God may undermine all religion. What is this intellectual love of God?

It is not a mental prejudice. That is the invasion of intelligence by something else. It is not the rationalization of our wish for God. Crude an-

thropomorphism lies that way. Rather is it cordial attention, hospitable appreciation. It is not a retreat from honesty but the approach to a larger honesty. It is giving intellectual welcome to all the intimations of God.

You can examine the great realities of truth and beauty and goodness with which the universe is so largely permeated and keep your mind shut to every intimation of their source and ground in God. You can study the frigid stars and discover yourself thinking God's thoughts after him. You can relive history with so exclusive attention to economic forces that the human drama becomes nothing but the story of a pig trough, or with a larger attention that makes it the epic of the commerce of man and God. You can read the gospels so absorbed in their politics and ecclesiasticism as utterly to miss the heart of their story of Jesus—his unique intimacy with Another. You can be so enamoured by the undoubted blessings science has conferred by its quantitative study of reality that you close your mind to the far more precious and significant qualitative aspects. Here is one of the most pathetic sicknesses of the age. It takes a larger mental life than that to be gripped by a sane religion. To flee prejudice and selfish rationalization is always wholesome. But the vacancy left by the removal of these vices needs to be filled by a hospitable and appreciative attitude to the solid spiritual realities of experience.

Right Side Up

Matthew 22:38: This is.....the first commandment.

Our day seldom believes it. Ask any of us if we believe in the two commandments to love God and to love our neighbors, and we reply with a swift and often irritated affirmative. Of course we do! But Jesus said that to love God is first. Instead of believing that, we actually reverse his order. We say, "To love thy neighbor is the first and great commandment. And a second is like unto it. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God if you feel like it. Thou shalt love Him more or less, but not more than is utterly convenient and conventional."

Here is one of the most widespread and perilous of all our disbeliefs in Jesus. We still try to pick figs from thistles, to patch shrunken garments with unshrunken cloth, to put new wine in unelastic wine-skins. Jesus would begin by making the tree good and then would not worry about the fruit. The fifteenth chapter of Luke is greater even than the Sermon on the Mount. The reborn heart is more even than the Golden Rule. Real religion lies even deeper than our conduct. It does not drive the will. It remakes it and then bids it be free. Religion that stands on its head is better than none. But it is awkward and unstable. Set it right side up. Love God—this is the first commandment.

The God of Man

Matthew 22:45: If David then calleth him Lord, how is he his son?

It was enough for the Pharisees to think of the Messiah as the son of David. Jesus thought of him as the "Son of Man."

The Italian Christian paints Jesus as an Italian, the French as a Frenchman, the Dutch as a Hollander, and so on. There is in this a touching tribute to the universal humanity of Jesus. It is a stirring affirmation. But when we let the affirmation become a negation, we are off the path.

We winced when the Kaiser spoke of "our good German God." But how often do Frenchmen speak and act as if God were a Parisian, the British as if He were an Englishman, Americans as if He were a Yankee. Jesus and his God transcend all nationalism. Here is the charter that will give both reverence and motive to missions. Here is the religious corrective of nationalism. Jesus is more than the son of David. He is the Son of Man. God is more than the God of David. He is the God of man.

One

Matthew 23:10: One is your master, even the Christ.

Not your parents, not your children, not your fraternity, not your college, not the church, not the

state, not your boss. I like the lad who calmly threw up his first job because his employer expected him each week to fetch four "potatoes," which turned out to be four bottles.

Humor and Tragedy

Matthew 23:24: Ye blind guides, that strain out the gnat, and swallow the camel.

Surely those who first heard these words must have smiled at the picture of one straining out an almost invisible bug only to gulp down a camel—head, hoofs, hide, humps and all. Still Jesus was in dead earnest. The whole tragedy of religious history is that it so often confuses gnats and camels. The whole meaning of Jesus may be found in his distinguishing between them.

Our practical estimate of denominations as more precious than the kingdom, our insistence that our ritual is right and all others wrong, our placing of dogma ahead of experience instead of seeing that its sole function is to give an ordered account of experience, our putting miracle so much nearer the center of religion than Jesus ever did—we have things as mixed as those who strained out the gnat and swallowed the camel.

Quality of personal life, the treating of others not as means but as personal ends, the opening of our lives to the influence of Jesus and the winds and

tides of God that most of all do blow and flow through him—to see and make these things first and central is no longer to be blind guides, straining out gnats and swallowing camels.

Etc.

Matthew 23:29–30: Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye build the sepulchres of the prophets, and garnish the tombs of the righteous, and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we should not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.

How about the Union League Clubs, and the Hamilton Clubs as citadels of the Republican party, that yet will not allow an African to enter their buildings except for some menial service?

Etc.

A Sob

Matthew 23:37: O Jerusalem, Jerusalem.

He has told the plain truth about the hypocrites among the scribes and Pharisees. With the truth he smites and sears. But he takes no delight in it. The truth is hurting him most of all. At the end his voice breaks in a veritable sob, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem."

To the Christian every human failure and disgrace is a family shame. It is his very own. You are personally ashamed for Nero and Napoleon.

You are personally ashamed for every street-walker in the town and each man who exploits her. You are personally ashamed for rottenness in government, for oil scandals and secret war-plottings. You are personally ashamed for the greed that fattens on men and women and little children. You may be angry, but you are more. You are hurt. These things are your affair, your family concern. Your indignation ends in a sob, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem."

Attention!

Matthew 24:42: Watch therefore: for ye know not on what day your Lord cometh.

Some things can be calculated with a high measure of confidence. You can plan for the time when the note will fall due, for the peak load in a seasonal industry, for the age limit in your profession, for the physical test of climbing the Matterhorn or of a political campaign. Not so with the coming of dire moral peril or supreme spiritual opportunity. These have no published time-table. They may come any time in the glance of an eye, the intonation of a voice, the detail of an ordinary business deal, the unheralded unveiling of an ideal, a phrase in anthem or sermon, a sudden cry of distress, a thought that wanders unbidden into the mind, a face that grows out of any crowd and reshapes itself into the face of Christ. No wonder that he so often bade us watch!

The Unsurveyed Country

Matthew 25:37: Lord, when saw we thee?

The emphasis is on the pronoun. That they had seen the hungry, the thirsty, the strangers, the naked, the sick, the imprisoned, and that they had done for these needy ones all that the Son of man said, was not debatable. All this was admitted as a matter of course. But the suggestion that they had ever done this for Jesus bewildered them utterly. "Lord, when saw we *thee?*"

> For the love of God is broader
> Than the measure of man's mind,
> And the heart of the Eternal
> Is most wonderfully kind.

Just plain disinterested kindness brings one into living intimacy with God as nothing else whatever can do—profound theology, ecclesiastical dignities, or anything else. In the final evaluation of life there hides a vast surprise. A multitude who have never thought themselves religious nor allowed anyone to call them Christian, who have just gone their way helping the helpless, smoothing rough paths, busy with "unremembered deeds of kindness and of love," will be amazed to discover that at the soul of things nothing has been lost and nothing forgotten, that what they have done in the foreground has reached into the farthest background.

There is a blessed amount of unconscious religion

in the world to offset the religion that thinks it is religion and is not. Beyond all the confines of organized and conscious religion there stretch great reaches of the Kingdom of God that no ecclesiastic has ever yet surveyed. It is peopled by those who practice uncalculating love. Many of its denizens would be astonished to be called religious. They have not seen. But they shall. Can there ever be better music than the chorus of these who ask in blank surprise, "Lord, when saw we *thee?*"

Where?

Matthew 25:40: Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these my brethren, even these least, ye did it unto me.

Where is Jesus? Back in Palestine? Up in heaven? Hidden in church?

He is as near as the least man or woman or child who needs the humblest service we can give.

Bread

Matthew 26:26: Jesus took bread.

Not cake, but bread. Religion might be spoken of under the figure of cake. It gives sweetness to the common fare of life. But it is not characteristic of Jesus to think of religion as dessert.

Nor did he select medicine as the symbol of reli-

gion. He might have. He was a good physician. Religion heals wounds nothing else can close and cures diseases nothing else can end. But it is not characteristic of Jesus to confine his thinking of religion to its emergency value.

No, he took bread. At the moment when he was approaching the supreme act of his life and wanted something to suggest its meaning to his friends, he found all he wanted in bread such as rested that night on every supper table in the city. So he taught that the primary function of religion is daily sustenance, hourly strength, momentary well-being.

The sphere of religion is the besetting moods that so commonly defeat us, the prevailing low vitality of our spiritual devotion, the chronic malnutrition of our souls, the habitual anæmia of our wills, the general second-rateness of our daily religious health. For all these he gives us bread.

Symbol

Matthew 26:26: This is my body.

It is no belittling of the Lord's Supper to speak of it as symbolism. All significant living is permeated with symbolism. A symbol is something in which men have deposited a meaning that transcends the physical properties of the object in order that men may read those meanings out again. All

manners are symbolic. The flag is a symbol. Not only the dots and dashes of the Morse code and the letters and lines of the mathematician and the chemist, but all spoken and written language are symbols pure and simple. Men want safety in travel. The colors red and green are no help in themselves. But men put into red the meaning of stopping and into green the meaning of going ahead and teach the public to read out of these colors what they have read into them. Thus do railroading and motoring become possible.

Jesus sits with his friends on the eve of his death. He wants them to understand his love—a love of uttermost sacrifice, a love for their uttermost benefit. He picks up the common viands of the table. He breaks the bread and pours the cup. He says, "This bread means my body broken for you, this cup means my life poured out for you." Next day his body is broken and his blood is shed.

Then presently his friends come together to eat again. The same viands are before them. But now the more than physical meaning that Jesus has put into the bread and wine leaps out upon the little company. The bread and the wine speak to them of the love that tasted utter sacrifice for them.

Bring intelligence to the Lord's Supper and the elements speak to you, "The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. Remember—you who remember so many things—remember him. You are the hundredth sheep. There is no agony, not even that

of the cross, that the divine love does not suffer to bring you back into the fold."

Where is there another symbol so precious and significant?

No Unanswered Prayer

Matthew 26:39: Let this cup pass away from me.

Was there ever another prayer like that? The cup was death. Many have prayed against death. But was there ever another death like this? It was untimely, striking at the beauty of early manhood. It was cruel in form, the most cruel that a cruel age had been able to invent. Yet these things did not make it unique. Its uniqueness appears when we see its injustice. Jesus did not deserve it. He knew that. No one else has ever deserved so well. There is no agony ever coming to any one of us that its injustice is not surpassed by the injustice of the death that Jesus prayed against.

Think also of who prayed this prayer. It was no stranger to God and no one unused to prayer. It was Jesus, of all friends of God the nearest, of all experts in prayer the greatest. Such a one made such a prayer. Where is another like it?

Still, the request was not granted. The cup did not pass away. Next day he drank it to the very dregs.

What then of the prayer? Did it not fail? By

no means. There never was a more successful prayer. The request was not granted. If it had been, would you ever have heard of Jesus? But the prayer had its answer. From this prostrate figure, his sweat becoming as it were great drops of blood falling down upon the ground, turn to the Jesus of the next day. See his serenity before the Sanhedrin. See him walk like a king into the presence of Pilate. See his leisure from himself on the *Via Dolorosa*. See his victory on the cross. The request was not granted. But in that strength the prayer was answered.

There need be no unanswered prayer.

The Locus of Prayer

Matthew 26:39: Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.

Is there any other single place where one may learn so much about prayer as from Jesus in the garden?

He has freely voiced his most private and personal desire. There is nothing too intimate for him to bring it to the Father. But it is not to tease the Father or to try to foist his will on God. That would be to deny that God is Father. It is safe for him to talk literally everything over with God only because his passionate longings are all immersed in a greater devotion to the Father's will.

An Eternal Gospel

Matthew 26:52: All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.

And yet some have said that Jesus has no teaching about war! It is true that he does not mention it as a governmental policy. But in all he says and means about the worth of personality and all he indicates about human relationships he gives the militarists a perfect case for hating him. Never more so than in this sentence.

Here speaks Jesus the statesman. Norman Angell's "The Great Illusion" is but a foot-note to this sentence. If history does not show that Jesus is right it shows simply nothing at all. Look at Jerusalem. Look at Rome. Look at a hundred places. To take the sword is to take weakness. To build with it is to build with weakness. The most ridiculed of Jesus' sayings is precisely the best demonstrated.

Who says we have no gospel to preach?

Paths from the Garden

Matthew 26:56: Then all the disciples left him, and fled.

We read the sentence with mingled feelings. There is pity for Jesus left alone in his devotion and his love. There is contempt for the disciples who thus abandoned him.

The first feeling is justifiable. Jesus had been more and more alone. The record of his movement from the sunny popularity that had been his in Galilee to the shadow of the cross is the record of a journey into deeper and deeper solitude. Neither his teaching nor his fellowship had enabled his friends to understand his method based on his faith that love is the strongest thing in the world. Just now sleep had seemed to them more important than to watch with him one hour. Now they leave him all alone in his love and in his woe. Of course we pity him.

But are we equally right in the disdain we feel for the deserters? Why did they run? The first answer is plain physical fear. They wanted to save their skins. Is there nothing like that among us? A student of American life recently said that the typical modern American is best described in terms of comfort. What righteous causes lag, what churches die at the core, what areas of the kingdom go unoccupied, what opportunities for Christian witnessing go unimproved, all because of our passion for comfort, which is just another name for physical fear.

The path from the garden led away from love. Jesus was left to carry the woe of the world alone. When we imagine that we really merit the extra portion of the good things of life that has fallen to us; when we are content that any child is less blessed than ours, that any woman is tempted more than

our women, that any man is shut out from the liberty and joy that we have; when we judge others in order not to have time to judge ourselves; we are on the road away from love and the path that leads out of the garden. There is a nobler mood than that of contempt for the disciples who left him, and fled. It is the mood that sees that there still are many ways out of the garden and that we are too often among those who crowd them.

Good for Peter!

Matthew 26:58: But Peter followed him afar off.

Good for you, Peter. That was far better than almost anybody else was doing. Still, you wished afterwards that you had done better. When that wish first came to you it made you weep,—weep bitterly. Yet we do not think of you today to censure you. We place ourselves beside you.

On us, too, something of his spell has fallen. He lures us and troubles us. His charm cannot be escaped. There is something in us that is kin to him and that will not let us be. So we do follow—but afar off.

Peter was interested in thrones—not in crosses! We still try to read Jesus in terms of comfort and of power. It can't be done. Just when we think we have succeeded, he turns and walks away from us toward Calvary. We have not captured him. We are afar off.

Churches try to use him as a tool of their imperialism. States try to drag him to war at the chariot wheels of their roaring patriotisms. Businesses try to annex him by a stupid trick of language by which a selfishly profitable paternalism is decked out as a genuine brotherhood. As individuals we make all our requests of him a cry for healing. But he escapes us. He leaves us far behind. He goes from us not to rule but to suffer, not to slay but to die, not to patronize but with his life blood to serve the least, not to be healed but to be wounded very sore.

Peter followed him afar off. But later Peter wept and followed him how closely! Give me such tears!

Do You Know Simon?

Matthew 27:32: And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him they compelled to go with them, that he might bear his cross.

Have you ever envied Simon, wished you might have been there not to displace him but to bear a part of the heavy weight that was crushing Jesus? Well, Cyrene was in Lybia in Africa. I wonder if Simon's skin was dark and that to a member of a race that has long borne burdens went the ineffable honor of easing the journey of Jesus to Calvary. Certain it is we cannot walk the way of the cross with Jesus except in a brotherhood that leaps to share the burdens of the lowliest. In lifting theirs, we are lifting his.

Successful Parenthood

Matthew 27:32: And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him they compelled to go with them, that he might bear his cross.

Mark says Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus. Then his sons must have become Christians so well known that they could serve to identify their father. That is a parental success indeed.

How came it? We are not told. Simon was *compelled* to bear the cross. But as he did it did there come to him some glance of gratitude or comradeship from that one who stumbled on beside him that made him ever after Christ's man in a devotion so infectious that it overflowed into his boys? That has happened with others! Did he change outward compulsion into inner love? There is nothing greater that any parent can do for his children. It transcends all argument and precept. Carry the cross lovingly and therefore freely—there is nothing greater!

Box Seats

Matthew 27:35–36: And when they had crucified him, they parted his garments among them, casting lots; and they sat and watched him there.

Is there any more terrible picture in all literature? I do not know one anywhere.

It was understood that the clothes of anyone sent

to crucifixion became the property of those who executed the sentence. So these soldiers sat on guard at the foot of the cross, handled the garments with which the tragedy had blessed them, and watched the sufferings of the crucified. The hours went by. Those that passed by railed on Jesus. The leaders of the people added their mockings to the mockings of the crowd. Jesus spoke his loving promise to the repentant malefactor and made loving provision for the care of his mother in the home of his friend. At last he gave his suffering spirit into the hands of God. The hours went by, but through them all, selfishly handling the clothes with which his death blessed them, the four Roman soldiers sat down and merely watched him there.

Terrible! But yet more terrible is it that so many still sit beside those soldiers. They had received from him only the blessing of an extra change of clothing. To get some measure of the blessing we receive from him, try to picture our world entirely without his inspiration to art and literature, without the institutions founded in his name, without the scale of values he presents, without the sense of God he gives us.

We have parted his garments among us. We are living in the enjoyment of the blessings he has left us. We have parted his garments among us. Then how often we merely sit and watch, as unconscious as the soldiers that he has something for us better than his garments, something for us to do better

than selfishly to watch—a life for us to live, a summons to all that is best within us to rise and follow him.

Praise from Enemies

Matthew 27:42: He saved others; himself he cannot save.

God chose strange voices that day for the telling of His truth.

On one level this taunt is a shallow lie. Jesus was not dying as a beast caught in a trap. His bodily safety—which was what his detractors now had in mind—had been completely in his own hands. He had foreseen the issue and had a thousand chances to save himself. He was dying freely and of his own will. On this level, the taunt was a lie.

But on another level it was profoundest truth. As a patriot has to die for his country and laments only that he does not have more lives to give; as strong men have to put women and children first into the boats while they remain to perish with the ship; as the mother has to throw herself into the flames to save her child while she herself suffers fatal burning; as the shepherd has to throw himself to the wolves that the sheep may go safe; so Jesus could not save himself. The outward compulsion was nothing. To say otherwise was to speak a lie. The inner necessity was everything. To put that in words, however unconsciously, was to speak profoundest truth.

Indeed it was because in this sense he could not save himself that he did save others. It is just because Jesus lived out a love like that to the uttermost and by his cross reared it above the horizon of human life where the ages gaze upon it that he is still transforming and saving men. Such a vision wrought by such a one touches and remakes us as nothing else can do. Not only out of the mouth of babes and sucklings but even out of the mouth of His enemies, God has perfected praise.

The Rent Veil

Matthew 27:51: And behold, the veil of the temple was rent in two from the top to the bottom.

The words mean so much more than the tearing of an expensive piece of cloth that it is a bitter shame to see in them nothing but one more knotty and wearisome question about the miraculous element in the Gospel records. Indeed, the more one ponders them the more one wonders if they were ever intended to record a physical miracle at all. One asks if from the first they were not written as a glorious picture—almost a summary—of what was taking place on the crucifixion hill.

God had been veiled. The best symbol men had of Him was a room without door, without window, without light, empty, untrod except as the High Priest entered it once a year on the Day of Atone-

ment, and shrouded by a curtain, a veil. As a protest against idolatry it was magnificent. As a representation of God, it was bankrupt. It pictured Him as inaccessible, vague, terrible.

When the blameless one laid down his life for men in perfect love, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom. God was unveiled. The barrier was seen to be gone. He was uncovered not as inaccessible but as welcoming the humblest and the least; not vague, but concrete as heroic and sacrificial love at its purest and best; not terrible, but in such love seeking every wandering sheep. It is the Gospel. Not only Judaism but all of us are called to gaze through the rent veil.

Recognizing the Impossible

Matthew 27:65: Pilate said unto them, Ye have a guard: go, make it as sure as ye can.

"As sure as ye can!" One wonders why Pilate put it just that way. Can it be that from his contacts with Jesus there had passed into his vacillating mind some deep suspicion that in Jesus he had met a power greater than that of his guard and of the Rome that his guard represented? It almost seems as if he had felt a challenge that Rome and all for which he stood were too weak to meet. It almost seems there is a note of irony, even of sur-

render, in his fretful response, "make it as sure as ye can." He was one with the chief priests and Pharisees in wanting to rid the world of this inconvenient Jesus. But perhaps he was not so sure as they that it could be done.

It could not. Everything in the historical reality of Christianity is proof it could not and was not. The tomb and the guard were failures.

How often that failure has been repeated. Men have entombed Jesus in their creeds. They have made him a concept of their minds, nicely trimmed and adjusted to current ideas and intellectual likings. They have buried him in their church systems and made him an ecclesiastical convenience—a tool with which to serve purposes very different from his own. We have entombed him in our nationalism, quoted him for Nordic supremacy and in his name prayed for the death of other peoples. We have offered social systems as his cemetery, even wresting him into a support of slavery and giving all too much point to those who regard his religion as the drug of the masses. And we have made these arrangements as sure as we can! But in vain.

The actual historical Jesus, transcending all nationalism and condemning all social cruelty, is more present in the consciousness of men today than he has been since the second century. From blind creed and church the actual Jesus Christ has reappeared as by a second resurrection.

"Go, make it as sure as ye can." But ye cannot.

Not There!

Matthew 28:6: Come see the place where the Lord lay.

There is a quest more valuable than the search for the true sepulchre. Could the rock-cut tomb in the garden of Joseph of Arimathea be determined beyond all doubt, it would be a positive injury to us if it distracted us from another and a greater burial that Jesus experienced. That grave was not in stone. It was in unbelief.

Where was there anyone on the first Good Friday night with any idea at all that Jesus was not utterly defeated? The women had no better thought than to embalm his body. The friends on the way to Emmaus could only speak of him as one in whom they "had hoped." Others knew nothing better than to return to their fishing and to be twitted for the rest of their lives as the erstwhile followers of a now crucified hope.

Deeper than any tomb of stone was his burial beneath the unbelief of his friends. This is the place where the Lord lay.

But he lies there no more. If he did, there would be no such thing as Christianity in the world at all. The verb is in the past tense. It is where he *lay*. What changed the tense of that verb from the present to the past?

The End of the Whole Matter

Matthew 28:20: And lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.

Don't let any metaphysical mystery blind you to the religious content of this sentence. All that Jesus was to men is forever available for us. He was the Word, the utterance of God. God is eternally vocal. That utterance is yet going on. Jesus was the man-ward side of God. God forever turns toward us in the self-same way. The channel Jesus was is a channel never to be shut. See him, and we still see the Father. Know him, and we still know God. Live with him and he is still Immanuel—God with us, even us!

"I AM PERSUADED THAT NEITHER DEATH, NOR LIFE, NOR ANGELS, NOR PRINCIPALITIES, NOR THINGS PRESENT, NOR THINGS TO COME, NOR POWERS, NOR HEIGHT, NOR DEPTH, NOR ANY OTHER CREATURE, SHALL BE ABLE TO SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE OF GOD, WHICH IS IN CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD."

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